

St Samson of Dol
and the Earliest
History of Brittany,
Cornwall and Wales



Edited by Lynette Olson

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ST SAMSON OF DOL
AND THE EARLIEST HISTORY
OF BRITTANY, CORNWALL AND WALES

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ST SAMSON OF DOL
AND THE EARLIEST HISTORY
OF BRITTANY, CORNWALL AND WALES

EDITED BY
LYNETTE OLSON

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

At the outset, I thank my fellow-contributors to this volume, Richard Sowerby, Joseph-Claude Poulin, Caroline Brett, Ian Wood, Constant Mews, Jonathan Wooding and Karen Jankulak, for being so forthcoming with their contributions and patient with sometimes picky editorial requirements. Although I haven't met all of you, I have come to think of you as a group of friends with common interests. Special thanks are due to Caroline Brett for summarising so effectively the colloquy stage of this project (see the third footnote to my study) and cheerful encouragement at all stages and to Jonathan Wooding for help in drafting the submission to the publisher, not least in finding the right title for this volume of collected studies; moreover I join with Joseph-Claude Poulin in expressing *remerciements* to Constant Mews for translating his study's summary into English. Thanks are also due, far beyond the remuneration she received, to my colleague Penny Nash, a published scholar in her own right on a slightly later period, for her care and accuracy in creating a unified bibliography and index; to Rebecca Plumbe, *une vraie informaticienne*, Educational Designer, FASS eLearning, Teaching and Technology Innovation, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney, for answering my computer enquiries; and to Linda Huzzey of Koolena Training and Mapping for drafting the final map.

Having for many years wanted to promote international scholarly discussion about the First Life of St Samson of Dol, the subject of this book, I am of course delighted at its publication. There is one regret, however. A main goal of the project is to bridge the gap over what, the Life tells us, the Insular Britons called 'the Southern Sea', which can be a difficult task; readers of the future, that's a topical reference! I set out to do so initially by the unusual method of inviting scholars who had published on the text to cross a far more southerly sea to a colloquy in Sydney. As it turned out, old age, illness and workload prevented the three French scholars from attending and it was left to Joseph-Claude Poulin (who is *québécois*) to uphold the French tradition of scholarship, which he does most ably, of course. With a view especially to bridging the aforementioned gap, readers are now invited to post their comments on the blog referred to in that third footnote to my study in Chapter 1 of this book.

With a publisher's deadline of 1 August it is irresistible to date the preface in the old-fashioned way.

Feast of St Samson (28 July), 2016

Lynette Olson
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Places associated with St Samson in the First Life. The square brackets indicate modern names which with greater or lesser certainty may be identified with places in the First Life; the other names are as they appear in the First Life.

INTRODUCTION:
‘GETTING SOMEWHERE’ WITH THE FIRST LIFE
OF ST SAMSON OF DOL

Lynette Olson

The First Life of St Samson of Dol is a very important source for the earliest history of Brittany, Cornwall, and Wales. It has geographical breadth. According to the Life, Samson travelled. It takes us to various parts of south Wales, to Ireland and back, across Cornwall, to Brittany and beyond, visiting a Merovingian court, the mouth of the River Seine, and the Channel Islands. The author of the Life has also travelled, having been in Cornwall and south Wales, according to several first-person statements, as well as Brittany. Travel back from the Continent at an intermediate stage is indicated by what the author says about a written source encountered in Cornwall, of which much more below. The Life also has chronological depth, relating to three temporal layers: the time of the saintly subject, of the intermediate written source, and of the author of the Life. The earliest history of Brittany, Cornwall, and Wales is not well served by textual sources. Yet this is the period that saw the establishment of the Church and the spread of the monastic movement in these regions. The First Life of St Samson of Dol is the most promising additional source of meaningful evidence about these processes. It is especially informative about Wales and Cornwall, and is in itself a valuable cultural product of Brittany and testimony to the links between these regions.

Yet there are problems with the First Life of St Samson of Dol that have tended to vitiate the usefulness of this source, and the need to address these is what has given rise to this book. The main one is the date. While Patrick’s writings may be said to fit most comfortably in the fifth century, and Gildas’ in the sixth, the dating of the Life has ranged over two and a half centuries, after 600 and before 850. What its author says about the sources of the Life, in a genre that is notorious for claiming evidence from good sources and delivering anything but, is anyway questionable. Also puzzling is the very large proportion of the Life that concerns Britain in comparison to what it says about Brittany, and especially Dol. Finally, the Life needs contextualisation.¹

¹ It comes at the beginning of an unusually extensive series of written sources. A Second Life of St Samson of Dol was composed in the mid-ninth century, which received a Metrical Addition in the early tenth century and was re-styled by Baudri of Bourgueil in the early twelfth century (see the Samson dossier in Poulin, *L’hagiographie bretonne*, 308–54, and for Baudri, Le Huërou [ed. & transl.], *Œuvres en prose*). The documents for the long-running episcopal dispute between Dol and Tours are usefully assembled in Martène & Durand (edd.), *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, III. 849–988.

Both the opportunities and problems are those of a Latin work, the *Vita (Prima) Sancti Samsonis* (henceforth *VIS*).² Recently a colloquium of scholars who have worked on this difficult text was convened to help in its examination.³ This was attended by most of the contributors to the present volume of collected studies that have either grown out of papers presented at the colloquium or been shaped by dialogue with its participants. Why these collected studies of *VIS* are needed is best apprehended by considering ‘the state of the question’. This has three parts: (1) the date of the text’s composition, (2) the reality or otherwise of an earlier biography which the author of the existing text claims to have used, and (3) the relationship between this existing biography and its putative model. Considering ‘the state of the question’ takes us back initially to vigorous early-twentieth-century debates seen in works by Fawtier, Duine, and Loth, together with a perceptive commentary by Burkitt, that appear in the Bibliography. Subsequent scholarship in what could be called the British tradition did not accept the revisionist date of the late eighth/early ninth centuries in what could be called the French tradition of scholarship, on the one hand, but, on the other, moved away from the latter’s traditional date of the early seventh century toward one later in that century.⁴ Thus differences about the date, and much else besides, of *VIS* persisted, limiting its usefulness as a historical source, and twentieth-century scholarship was as divided on the question at the end of the century as at its beginning. Then there were two developments that offered an opportunity for ‘getting somewhere’ with this source. The first was the appearance in 1997 of a new edition by Pierre Flobert which provides a sound critical basis for study of the text.⁵ The second is an article by Richard Sowerby in *Francia* (2011), which provides new grounds for distinguishing between the successive authors’ contributions to the text and makes a powerful argument for its earlier date *ca* 700.⁶

All of the above are about the text with which the collected studies are concerned. Two matters will receive extended treatment here in what will function as both an introduction and an independent study in its own right: the reality of an earlier biography and a critique of Sowerby’s article. The latter will overlap with the former and also with some consideration of the ecclesiastical context of *VIS* later in the study.

² Modern editions are Fawtier, *La Vie de saint Samson: Essai de critique hagiographique* (1912) and Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson de Dol. Texte édité, traduit et commenté* (1997), the latter is a proper critical edition with a French translation. Taylor, *The Life of St Samson of Dol*, is a faulty translation of the faulty edition by Fawtier, but it will serve to give an overview of the Life and locate passages of interest for examination in the Latin original.

³ ‘Over the Southern Sea ... S. Samson à Sydney’, 12–13 June, 2013 (in association with the Eighth Australian Conference of Celtic Studies). Its deliberations are admirably summed up by Caroline Brett at <http://anglosaxonnorseandceltic.blogspot.com.au/2013/07/st-samson-colloquy-report.html>, accessible at time of writing.

⁴ Hughes, ‘The Celtic Church’, 4–5, and Wood, ‘Forgery’, 380–4. Cf. Olson, ‘The date’, and also discussion of the author’s account of his sources in the Prologue to *VIS*, below. Charles-Edwards as cited in n.75 below favours the seventh century.

⁵ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*. All citations of *VIS* in this book are from this edition. I renew my thanks to Professor Flobert for sending me a copy with additions and corrections *sua manu*. Some are offered together with a *stemma* in Flobert, ‘Les vicissitudes’. There is a concordance: Le Duc, *Vitae Sancti Samsonis*.

⁶ Sowerby, ‘The Lives’. This includes a most effective refutation of Flobert’s argument that the author of *VIS* used the works of Bede, 21, n.107. Sowerby identifies Tigernal whose death is recorded for 707 in the Annals of Lorsch and Moselle as Bishop Tigernomalus at whose request *VIS* was written and on this basis dates it *ca* 700; however, assuming that they are the same person, if he was long in life and office the date of *VIS* might be rather earlier.

Introduction

The argument will make a number of points working from the internal consistency of *VIS* itself and will frequently be based on its wording.

Was there an earlier Life?

An earlier written work about Samson is referred to by the author as a source not only in the Prologue to *VIS* but also a number of times later in the work. The difficult passage in the Prologue in which he gives his sources will be examined first along with subsequent source references in *VIS*. The former is sufficiently important as well as complex to warrant reproduction in the text of both the Latin original and its translation.

Primo autem omnium credi a me uos uolo⁷ quod non iuxta adinventionis meae temeritatem nec iuxta inordinata et incompressa audita haec uerba collecta sunt, sed iuxta hoc quod audiui⁸ a quodam religiose ac venerabili sene, in cuius domo, ultra mare, quam ipse solus Samson fundauerat, ille, per octogenarios fere annos, catholicam religiosamque uitam ducens, propissimeque⁹ temporibus eiusdem supradicti sancti Samsonis, matrem¹⁰ eius tradidisse auunculo suo sanctissimo diacono, qui et ipse diaconus consobrinus esset sancto Samsoni, mihi ueraciter affirmabat, multaque de eius admirabilibus gestis ad me misericorditer referens; et non solum hoc, sed etiam quamplura ac delicata de eius prodigioribus actibus, quae citra mare in Britannia ac Romania mirabiliose fecit, uerba, supradictus sanctus diaconus, Henocus nomine, congruis stilis polite ultra mare adportauit, et ille, de quo nuper praefati sumus, uenerabilis senex semper ante me in istud monasterium commanens pie legere ac diligenter faciebat.

In the first place of all, however, I want you to believe me¹¹ that these words have been assembled not according to the rashness of my invention, nor according to disordered and disarranged hearsay, but according to this which I heard from a certain religious and venerable old man, in whose house beyond the sea, which Samson himself alone¹² had founded, he leading a catholic and religious life for almost eighty years and very nearly in the times of the same above-mentioned St Samson¹³ affirmed to me

⁷ Cf. 'credi te a me uolo' (*VIS*, II.1). On the construction see Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 141n.

⁸ This word is added by the editor Flobert (*ibid.*, 140).

⁹ The early manuscript variant is *promissimeque*, which seems impossible.

¹⁰ Emended from *mater* by the editor (*ibid.*, 140). The early manuscript variant for *tradidisse* is *tradens se*.

¹¹ Or, 'First, however, I want you of all people to believe me ...'.

¹² *Solus* reinforcing the meaning 'Samson himself' is said by J. Loth to follow the Breton usage of 'le mot *un, unan*, un (seul) avec le pronom possessif pour exprimer le sens du latin *ipse*' ('La Vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson de Dol', 299, citing without textual reference F. Duine). Loth also sees the probable influence of Breton idiom in *legere faciebat* ('La Vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson, abbé-évêque de Dol', 305n). Cf. Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 67–8.

¹³ Application of the phrase 'propissimeque temporibus eiusdem supradicti sancti Samsonis' to the old man differs from the reading of A. de la Borderie, who connects it to the relation of information by Samson's mother to Henoc: 'Je les tiens d'un vénérable vieillard qui ... m'affirmait positivement que, dans le temps même du très pieux [he employs the variant *piissimique*, found in two manuscripts from the end of the twelfth century, which can hardly be correct] saint Samson, tout cela avait été conté par la mère du saint à un très saint diacre ...' (*Histoire de Bretagne*, I.560–1). It does not seem that the author of the *Vita* would have inserted a *-que* between the subject (*ille*) and the predicate of the sentence; rather, the adverbial phrase introduced by *propissimeque* must be associated with *ducens*, which modifies *ille*.

veraciously that his (Samson's) mother had recounted (information) to his (the old monk's) uncle, a most holy deacon, which same deacon was a cousin¹⁴ to St Samson, and compassionately relating to me many things concerning his wonderful deeds; and not only this, but also the above-mentioned holy deacon, Henoc by name, conveyed beyond the sea elegantly by harmonious compositions very many and delightful words concerning his (Samson's) more marvellous acts which he performed most wonderfully on this side of the sea in Brittany and Romania,¹⁵ and that venerable old man about whom we have formerly spoken dwelling always in that monastery before my time [or 'before me'] read (them) piously and diligently.¹⁶

Here the author gives his sources of information about Samson as an old man and a text in a monastery in Britain. While it is the text that is our concern, it must be remarked that even on the testimony of the author the traditional dating of *VIS* to the early seventh century cannot be right, assuming that the saint is the Samson who signed the proceedings of the Council of Paris in the 560s, and must be abandoned.¹⁷ The questions about the source text are not only whether it existed but also, if it did, what it contained and where it was written; the last of these can be addressed at this point. Actually, '*quamplura ac delicata de eius prodigiosis actibus, quae citra mare in Britannia ac Romania mirabiliose fecit, uerba, supradictus sanctus diaconus, Henocus nomine, congruis stilis polite ultra mare adportauit*', focussing on the words italicised here, says that the deacon conveyed a text beyond the sea (and was so translated by Flobert).¹⁸ This could be taken to indicate that it was composed on the Continent – but perhaps it need not. The author's aim here was to explain where the information about Samson's deeds on the Continent, about which the saint's mother would not have known, had come from, and we may not expect precision about the means. Note that when the time comes, the resourceful author is careful to point out that Samson took Henoc ('et maxime diacono illo de quo iam nos dixisse sufficit' 'and especially that deacon concerning whom what we have already said suffices') with him to Brittany.¹⁹ To the author and his audience, the existence of a written source was significant in itself, conveying authority as well as knowledge, wherever it was written. The issue, however, is important to our analysis because Richard Sowerby argues that this source text was written in the monastery that Samson had founded in Britain, to suit its interests, as will be seen.

¹⁴ Or, 'relation'.

¹⁵ Apparently the part of Gaul not settled by the British (cf. Du Cange, *Glossarium*, VII.209). The distinction is a linguistic, not political one. Flobert's identification of Britannia as insular Britain (*La Vie ancienne*, 142n) cannot be right, for these are deeds done *citra mare*, that is, on the Continent. The use of *citra mare* and *ultra mare* in *VIS* is discussed below.

¹⁶ *VIS*, Prol.2.

¹⁷ The old man with whom the author had spoken had been a monk for almost eighty years, and he was not quite a contemporary of Samson. De la Borderie's date for *VIS* 'au plus tard vers 610–615' (*Histoire de Bretagne*, I.561) is not surprising, given his reading of the Latin as in n.13 above. The identification of the saint with the signatory of the council is generally accepted in these collected studies (see esp. Wood below), although I still prefer the judicious 'reasonably probable' of Kenney, *The Sources*, 175, for it. Flobert is more positive: 'La seule mention historique de s. Samson n'est pas absolument certaine, mais son contexte est assez favorable pour lever tous les doutes' (*La Vie ancienne*, 10).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 143, and so understood in the blog referred to in n.3 above.

¹⁹ *VIS*, I.52.

Introduction

Examination of subsequent passages where the author refers to earlier writing about Samson as a source will address the other two questions of the existence of an earlier biography and whether it concerned only Samson's deeds on the Continent, as the Prologue says, or was a full Life of the saint. Analysis of passages later in *VIS* gives some indication that Henoc wrote about Samson's activities in Britain as well as on the Continent. Concerning a monk whom Samson cured of demonic possession in Ireland, the author notes:

He followed St Samson to this side of the sea and was always his companion; indeed whose good acts and good conversation after his ruin I know but whose name I do not know; however, the transmarine letters already named above informing me about him, I hold it certain that he died in the monastery of Pental and led a very good and arduous life there.²⁰

The only transmarine letters which have appeared previously in the text are those of Henoc; the information which the author here attributes to them concerns the Continent, the monastery of Pental being in Neustria, as accords with the Prologue statement about Henoc's written work. In book II of *VIS*, a sermon for delivery on the saint's feast day, there is a story which must be about Samson before he left Wales, for it refers to his visit to Bishop Dubricius, who was his mentor there. The source of one portion of this is indicated: 'knowledgeable and religious men, and, what is more, letters written in accordance with the Catholic faith in his own [Samson's] monastery across the sea'.²¹ The passage is similar to a short summary of the author's sources for *VIS* which comes a little later in the Prologue than the long account quoted at the beginning of our discussion:

According to those things which I discovered among the holiest and most knowledgeable men, and also according to the very careful and very beautiful writing, which I found composed in accordance with the Catholic faith and indubitably by the above-mentioned deacon in the same monastery ...²²

This refers of course to Henoc's text, and it is very tempting to think that the passage in book II does also, and that Henoc wrote about Insular as well as Continental matters. Finally, allusion in book I, chapter 1 of *VIS* to the 'emendationibus gestis' of Samson as a written source of information about Samson's grandparents may be

²⁰ 'sanctum Samsonem citra mare secutus est ac comes illius semper fuit. Cuius bona quidem acta ac bonam conuersationem post ruinam scio, sed nomen nescio. Referentibus autem mihi de eo litteris transmarinis supra iam insignatis, in Penetale monasterium quieuisse atque inibi optimam et arduam uitam duxisse certum teneo' (*VIS*, I.38).

²¹ 'ut mihi comperti ac religiosi et, quod est maius, litterae ipsius loco ultra mare catholice conscriptae tradiderunt' (*VIS*, II.8). *Locus* commonly means 'monastery' in early medieval Celtic sources (Loth, 'La vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson, abbé-évêque de Dol', 310n).

²² pro his quae apud sanctissimos ac conpertos admodum uiros, necnon et pro sedulissimis ac pulcherrimis litteris, quas catholice ac indubitanter a supradicto diacono in eodem monasterio conscriptas repperi ...' (*VIS*, Prol.4). 'Pulcherrimis litteris' copie Cassiod., *Inst.* 1, 15, 15.' (Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 144). Flobert translates *catholice* as 'selon la foi catholique' in both places (*ibid.*, 253 and 145).

a citation of Henoc's work, again suggesting that this did not deal solely with the Continent.²³

It is time to draw some conclusions. Almost without exception, the references in *VIS* to written sources appear to relate to the same one, the written work by Henoc. The author continues on from the passage last cited to say that he has heard the names of Samson's parents read out at Mass, while in I.42 a synod summons Samson by letter, 'quod indiculum ego audiui lectum' 'which short letter I myself have heard read'; even the latter might be a reference to a document transcribed in Henoc's account (although I would not want to push this). There was an earlier biography of Samson. It is not just an old book mentioned in the Prologue; the author of *VIS* comes back to it in a work marked by internal consistency. The name 'Henoc', that is, 'Enoch', has always been regarded as a suspicious feature, being that of the all-too-appropriate author of the apocryphal Book of Enoch. I do not insist on his identity but, rather, on the reality of the text attributed to him.

Also significant in this regard are the author's fairly frequent and utterly consistent use of the phrases *ultra mare* 'beyond the sea' and *citra mare* 'on this side of the sea'. The author employs them both from his own perspective (he writes in the monastery of Dol in Brittany),²⁴ and in a couple of cases from the perspective of his subjects in Britain. Three examples can be seen in the passage from the Prologue that we have examined above. Working backwards, there is the reference to Samson's 'more marvellous acts which he performed most wonderfully on this side of the sea in Brittany and Romania', concerning which 'the above-mentioned holy deacon, Henoc by name, conveyed beyond the sea elegantly by harmonious compositions very many and delightful words', which in turn were read by 'a certain religious and venerable old man, in whose house beyond the sea, which Samson himself alone had founded', the author got his information. Thus *citra* and *ultra mare* here are all from the author's Breton perspective; nevertheless, the passage is the first of several statements in *VIS* that the author has himself been *ultra mare*, that is, in Britain. When next these words are used, in I.9, they are from the perspective of Abbot Illtud in south Wales, who prophesies the great career of his new disciple Samson *citra ultraque mare* 'on this side and beyond the sea', that is, in Britain and on the Continent. That the author is cognisant of an insular British perspective can be seen from his reference in I.47 to 'mare quod Austreum uocant, quidquid ad Europam ducit', 'the sea which they call Southern, which leads to Europe'. In I.38 an abbot whom Samson cured of demonic possession in Ireland is said to have followed him *citra mare*, where he became a monk at Samson's monastery of Pental near the mouth of the River Seine. Using the first person, the author gives his source for the latter as 'litteris transmarinis supra iam insignatis', 'transmarine letters already noted above', that is, Henoc's account

²³ The author tells us the names of Samson's parents, that they were from Dyfed and Gwent in south Wales, and of their marriage, and continues: 'Parentes uero eorundem coniugum altores regum utriusque prouintiae pro certo scimus, siquidem et in aliis eiusdem sancti Samsonis emendationibus gestis atque ibidem propinquioribus ita conscriptum indubitanter conperimus ...' 'We know for certain that the parents of this same couple were fosterers of the kings of both provinces, and indeed we have found it unquestionably so written in other more correct deeds of the same St Samson and nearer to that very time ...'. 'Emendationibus gestis' is borrowed from Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 3.3 (Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 147; identified by Duchesne, *Fastes*, 1st ed., Paris, 1900, II.381n, cited in Fawtier, *La Vie*, 36; see also Loth, 'La Vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson, abbé-évêque de Dol', 308–12).

²⁴ *Citra mare* for the author is the Continent (for example, *VIS*, I.52). For his location at Dol see *VIS*, II.10 together with II.15.

of Samson mentioned in the Prologue as we have seen.²⁵ In I.45 Samson receives a prophetic vision of his own that he should become a pilgrim and will be great *ultra mare*, here the Continent from Samson's south Welsh perspective. Samson accordingly voyages 'citra Habrinum mare', to this side of the Severn sea' from the author's southern, Breton perspective. His geographical knowledge on this point is unique among the early Breton saints' Lives: he actually knows that the Severn sea lies between Wales and Cornwall because of his own travels, as we shall see.²⁶ Having crossed Cornwall and founded a monastery there, Samson in I.52 sailed *citra mare* and 'reached the desired port in Europe'.²⁷ Chapter 60, near the end of book I in *VIS*, makes a summary reference to Samson's great deeds *ultra citraque mare*, in Britain and on the Continent. In book II, which gives some additional material on Samson in the form of a sermon for his feast day, a source of an episode in south Wales is 'litterae ipsius loco ultra mare catholice conscriptae', 'catholically written letters in his own place beyond the sea', which as I have already argued is another reference to Henoc's account in Samson's overseas monastic foundation.²⁸ Finally, later in the sermon (II.11) the saint's feast is said to 'shine forth happily today' 'apud multos Britannorum Romanorumque ultra citraque mare', 'among many Britons and Romans beyond and on this side of the sea'.

Following the phrases *citra mare* and *ultra mare* through *VIS* has allowed us a glimpse of Samson's travels therein: from his native south Wales briefly to Ireland and back, then across Cornwall via two identifiable place-names and on to the Continent where he spends the rest of his life. Yet *VIS* has not only a travelling saint, it has a travelling author, who has been outside of Brittany in Wales and Cornwall. He tells us so in a number of declarations of personal experience using the pronoun *ego*, which are surveyed in Poulin's study below. There is also an intermediate transmarine contact that resulted in the presence of an earlier biography of Samson at the monastery that he had founded in Britain. As we have seen, what the author of *VIS* says about the nature of that contact is open to more than one interpretation: the earlier biography was written on the Continent by the deacon Henoc, who brought it back to Samson's British monastery, or it was brought thence by other means (the Prologue does not state outright that the old man in the monastery had spoken with his uncle Henoc but, rather, that he had read his uncle's writings); or Henoc returned to the British monastery and wrote the earlier biography there. This brings us to Sowerby's article.

In 'The Lives of St Samson: Rewriting the ambitions of an early medieval cult', Richard Sowerby argues that an earlier biography has been reworked, and added to, by the author of *VIS*. He takes the colophon at the end of book I, 'Here it ends in the Name of the Lord. Up to this point we have corrected it as much as we were able to,' as an expression of this reworking of an existing text, noting Baudri of Bourgueil's 'ad codicem antiquum corrigendum' in the preface to his early-twelfth-

²⁵ See n.20 above.

²⁶ Contrast the *Vita Pauli Aureliani* by Wrmonoc, whose geography north of the Channel is vague (edd. Cuissard, 'Vie de Saint Paul', and Plaine, 'Vita sancti Pauli').

²⁷ 'prospero cursu portum in Europa desideratum tenuerunt'.

²⁸ See n.21 above.

century Life of Samson (basically the Second, mid-ninth-century, Life restyled).²⁹ Sowerby contends that the Judual episode, which brings Samson to the court of King Childebert I, in *VIS*, I.53–9, is an interpolation by its author. Here he is worth quoting at some length:

The *Vita prima* is far less episodic than is the norm in early medieval hagiography. There is a great deal of continuity between events, and internal references are frequently made between chapters as objects and minor characters appear and reappear. The audience is expected to remember what had come before ... Individual chapters are not self-sufficient *lectiones*, but run continuously from one into the next ... In short, the restoration of Judual is a rare interruption in the narrative of the *Vita prima*. It looks like little other than an addition to an existing text.³⁰

He does not consider that the text of the earlier biography is recoverable with any precision from *VIS*, however.³¹

Sowerby recognises the Cornish provenance of the earlier biography of Samson. In a previous publication, I showed that the only monastery which Samson is said in *VIS* to have founded in Britain is the one in Cornwall; I summarise my argument again here.³² As we have seen, in the Prologue the author gives his source as an old man and a text in a monastery, the key phrases being:

a quodam religioso ac uenerabili sene, in cuius domo, quam ultra mare ipse solus Samson fundauerat uenerabilis senex semper ante me in istud monasterium commanens pie legere ac diligenter faciebat.

The *VIS* does not say here or elsewhere that Samson founded only one monastery in Britain;³³ nevertheless, as the account proceeds there is only one place in Britain describing the action of Samson in these terms:

pro uirtutis ostense honore iussit suis ut monasterium prope antrum fundarent (*VIS*, I.50)

ac monasterium illud perfecte constructum suo patri praesulatu praecipiente (*VIS*, I.52)

and that is the monastery in Cornwall. The wilderness-retreat of Samson and three companions near the River Severn does not count.³⁴ Their ascetic arrangements are correctly seen as a stage of monastic progression,³⁵ but lack permanence in *VIS*:

²⁹ *VIS*, I.61: 'Finit in nomine Domini. Vsque hic sicut ualuimus correximus'; the translation is from Sowerby's discussion, 'The Lives', 25f. It is found in the two oldest manuscripts of *VIS* (Flobert's Class I, which he dates to the beginning of the eleventh century or perhaps to the end of the tenth century) only (Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 85–6, 44–5, 50–1). I must admit to having read the colophon as a scribal rather than authorial comment. For the Lives of Samson see n.1 above.

³⁰ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 24–5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 28–9.

³² Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 10–11, and 'The early hagiography', 128–9.

³³ Of course *solus* in the first passage, as stated in n.12 above, reinforces *ipse* in reference to Samson in a phrase which Flobert well translates as 'Samson en personne' (*La Vie ancienne*, 141).

³⁴ *VIS*, I.40–2.

³⁵ Cf. Wooding and Jankulak below.

Samson is called from the wilderness to be made abbot of an important monastery (I.42) and his three companions are eventually shown accompanying the saint on his southern pilgrimage (I.45), leaving the Severn site at least temporarily deserted (although a cult continued there in the author's day).³⁶ Concerning the Cornish one, the author is clear and precise. In the passages above Samson orders his companions 'that they found a monastery', and when that *monasterium* (the word is used again) was finished, he put his father Amon in charge of it before leaving for Brittany. It is an ongoing institution. We can have some confidence in the integrity and internal consistency of *VIS*. The author appears to have his narrative fairly well in hand: it is not confused and does not suffer from gaps. He seems conscientious in his task and attentive to it, and was thus unlikely to omit from the saint's deeds the founding of a monastery (clearly regarded by him as a significant undertaking) to which he has referred in the Prologue. Note that at Dol Samson 'fundauit monasterium', while at Pentel near the mouth of the Seine he arranged for a *monasterium magnificum* to be built and staffed with monks.³⁷ Although he says several times that he is limiting his account of Samson, in so doing he gives some idea of what he is leaving out. There is not the slightest indication in the text that Samson founded more monasteries in Britain than the author has specifically mentioned.³⁸ At the time the author was there and spoke to the old man, the monastery in Cornwall possessed an account of the deeds of its founder Samson.

If the reader will pardon a digression, there are a couple of points to make about places in Cornwall. The site of the northern Cornish monastery called *Docco* at which Samson arrives after crossing the Severn Sea (*VIS*, I.45–7) should be at the parish church of St Kew, near which the Latin- and ogom-inscribed stone was found, rather than Lanow farm, the barton of the secular part of the original manor when it was divided between Lanow Sant and Lanow Mur later in the middle ages. The link between the 'monasterium quod Docco uocatur' of *VIS* and the grant of land 'in monasterio quod ab incolis Landochou uocitatur' to SS. Dochou and Cywa in a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charter and the collegiate status of the post-Conquest

³⁶ *VIS*, I.41: 'locusque in quo tres fratres supradicti fuerant usque ad tempus quando ego fui in Britannia magno semper uenerabatur cultu' 'and the place in which the above-mentioned three brothers were was up to the time when I myself was in Britain always venerated by a great cult'; *locus* can mean 'monastery' and does in a passage from *VIS* previously cited (n.21 above), yet at no time is the word *monasterium* used in connection with this site, or anything said about a foundation there.

³⁷ *VIS*, I.52: 'Ac inde exiens, Deo duce, aptissimum repperit inibi locum atque honorificum fundauit monasterium quod usque hodie, proprio uocabulo, Dolum nuncupatur' 'And going thence, God leading, he found a most suitable place there and founded an honourable monastery that until today, by a proper name, is called Dol', and I.59: 'et monasterium ei magnificum in loco unde serpentem eiecerat, regis opitulatione, construere disponente, fratresque inibi cum regis hortatu ad opus exercendum dimittente ...' 'and [Samson] arranging with the help of the king that a magnificent monastery be built for him in the place whence he had driven out the serpent, and sending with the encouragement of the king brothers there to oversee the work ...'.

³⁸ As there is for Brittany (*VIS*, I.52: 'multaque inde mirabilium opera seminans ac multa monasteria per totam pene prouintiam fundans, quae, si per singula omnia scribantur, ad excessum de inceptis ducemur' 'and thence disseminating many miraculous works and founding many monasteries throughout almost the whole province, which, if they were all each described would lead us to digression from the subject' (this follows on from the quotation from this chapter in the previous note).

church there is very important for the ecclesiastical history of Cornwall.³⁹ Also, the route followed by Samson and his party after leaving this place which has them travelling apparently at some length through the *pagus Tricurius* (*VIS*, I.48), if this district was anywhere near the same as Trigg Hundred in which the name survives, does not suit a direct crossing of the Cornish peninsula, but would be right if they were going around Bodmin Moor. It should be recalled that the author of *VIS* has been to Cornwall. Such a route might bring them to the site of the parish church of St Samson at South Hill, where there is a sixth- or seventh-century monogram chi-rho carved on a stone pillar, ‘discovered on a rockery in the rectory garden’ near the church in 1891.⁴⁰ It is at this point that the author says, when describing an incident in Cornwall, ‘on which hill I indeed have been, and I have revered and touched with my hand the sign of the cross which St Samson carved by his hand with a certain iron tool on a standing stone’.⁴¹ A tentative suggestion may be made which would imply that the author was familiar with whatever led to the dedication to Samson at the site of South Hill: the cross on the standing stone which he saw and touched could have been the chi-rho there.⁴² South Hill was not in the *pagus Tricurius*, where the author implies that the cross was located. Perhaps he had been impressed by the chi-rho, and fitted it into his narrative at what seemed an appropriate point. In general, the author appears to have had real information about Cornwall at his disposal, but we must not expect too much of the way in which he uses it. In any case, the stone at South Hill, like the one at St Kew, indicates christian activity on these sites in the time of Samson or of his early hagiographers.

As already stated, Sowerby recognises the Cornish provenance of the earlier biography of Samson, but he goes further: it wasn’t just from Cornwall but was written there in the interests of the Cornish monastery where it was preserved. It was a ‘Cornish Life’.⁴³ The wording of the Prologue could just cover a situation where not a text but its potential author crossed the Channel, although the former is the more obvious meaning. Subsequent references indicate that it was not confined to Samson’s career on the Continent as could be inferred from the Prologue. And there are attractive features to what Sowerby proposes that are not noted in his article. I find it rather delightful to see in the *Docco* episode monastic one-upmanship: it was very much in the interests of the newer southern Cornish monastery to record their northern Cornish brethren as having ‘become lax in our former practices’.⁴⁴ Also, might the considerable attention to Samson’s family in *VIS* be due to its being a reworking of an earlier Life by a member of that family?⁴⁵

The potentially greatest benefit of Sowerby’s argument is that it could explain why there is so much more about Samson’s career in Britain than on the Continent

³⁹ See Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 14 and 81–3. The inscribed stone (Macalister, *Corpus*, I.462, no.484) bears the name not of Docco or Viniauu or (as is hardly likely, given the story) Samson, but of Iustus.

⁴⁰ Macalister, *Corpus*, I, no.486, quotation from page 464.

⁴¹ *VIS*, I.48: ‘in quo monte et ego fui, signumque crucis quod sanctus Samson sua manu cum quodam ferro in lapide stante sculpsit adoraui et mea manu palpaui’.

⁴² Even Fawtier, whose scepticism about the historicity of *VIS* in his edition of it sparked the early-twentieth-century controversy, makes this suggestion (*La Vie*, 61).

⁴³ ‘The Lives’, 25–31.

⁴⁴ *VIS*, I.46–7: ‘Hoc enim scire uolo quod iam in nostris prioribus institutis laxamur’, explains Viniauu, *sanctissimus* and *sanctus*, advising Samson that it would not be meet for him to stay with them, lest discord arise between the brethren and Samson, their better.

⁴⁵ See now Sowerby’s study below.

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in *VIS*, which gives a strong impression that at the time it was composed there was very little tradition about Samson extant at Dol.⁴⁶ The Breton episodes are very few compared to Samson's activities in Britain: two brief anecdotes and one fairly long and complicated story, accompanied by the author's assertions that to give more would unnecessarily prolong the text (*VIS*, I.52–60). If so, it is curious that book II, a homily for the saint's feast, adds a British episode, another set in the Channel Islands, and two Dol legends about Samson's posthumous powers, but nothing about the Continental deeds of Samson. It is striking that the author cites an overseas source for such matters, writing as he does in the monastery of Dol, which traced its foundation to Samson and possessed his body (*VIS*, I.61), but apparently not very much information about him. This observation in itself could suggest that the author reworked an earlier biography from elsewhere. Sowerby has identified that earlier Life as being one from Cornwall, not the Life of a different saint but of Samson himself. Yet his argument is not unproblematic. As we have seen, Sowerby takes the Judual episode (the fairly long and complicated story mentioned above) as having been added by the author of *VIS* in his reworking of the earlier biography. This is not just about Samson lending a hand in early Breton politics and Frankish relations, however, it is also about the foundation, with royal Frankish patronage, of Samson's monastery of Pental at the mouth of the Seine. The passage from *VIS*, I.38, examined above, informs us that the Irish monk who followed Samson all the way to the Continent ended his life 'in monasterium Penetale' and gives the source as 'litteris transmarinis supra iam insignatis', that is, Henoc's written account. With the only time that monastery is named in *VIS* thus attributed to the earlier biography, it becomes harder to accept that the foundation of Pental did not figure therein.

Episcopal status

Where I am not at all in agreement with Sowerby's argument is in the particular significance it attributes to what the Life says about Samson's episcopal status. This is given great emphasis – frankly, hype – in *VIS*. His future as high priest (*summus sacerdos*) is foretold to Samson's mother by an angel in I.4 and a Welsh prophet in I.5 and by Abbot Illtud to his parents in I.9.⁴⁷ It comes true when Samson is made bishop by bishops Peter, James, and John in a night vision and this is subsequently confirmed by an earthly ceremony during which a heaven-sent dove hovered over Samson as he sat on 'cathedram episcopalem' (I.43–4).⁴⁸ Joseph-Claude Poulin has commented on the striking use of the adjective *apostolicus* in *VIS*.⁴⁹ At the outset the author addresses 'Tigernomaglus, bishop of an apostolic see'; Count Guedian and

⁴⁶ F.C. Burkitt registers this in his somewhat overlooked article ('St Samson', 48 and 55). Cf. Jankulak, 'The absent saint', 197f.

⁴⁷ The last in the following terms: 'En augustum omnium nostrum caput, en pontifex summus multis citra ultraque mare profuturus, en egregius omnium Britannorum sacerdos, en peritissimus omnium ecclesiarum post apostolos fundator' 'Behold our august head of all, behold the highest priest to be beneficial to many on this side and the other side of the sea, behold the worthy bishop of all the Britons, behold the most adept founder of churches of all after the apostles'.

⁴⁸ Bishop Dubricius likewise has a vision. The words *summus sacerdos* and *episcopus* occur several times in these passages. The customary day for episcopal consecration is said in I.42 to be the feast 'beati Petri apostoli cathedrae'. The dove had likewise graced Samson's ordinations as deacon and priest (I.13 and 15). There is one more prophetic vision to come, see below.

⁴⁹ In the Sydney St Samson colloquium.

his army in Cornwall come to Samson, ‘desiring that he take to himself apostolic service’, that is, become their bishop (he declines); King Childebert receives Samson ‘with apostolic honour’; and the word occurs four more times, generally evoking the biblical apostles in praise of Samson.⁵⁰ Samson was made bishop in Wales, but does not remain there. He is advised by a messenger from God ‘indeed you ought not to tarry longer in this country, for you are destined to be a pilgrim and will be very great in the Church beyond the sea, worthy of high priestly honour’.⁵¹ So Samson leaves his flock, albeit accompanied on his journey south by his three erstwhile companions in the wilderness and other *fratres*.⁵² He brings his episcopate to Brittany.

Sowerby confirms the stress on Samson’s episcopal status in *VIS*, but sees it as redounding to the prestige, ‘asserting the authority’, of the Cornish monastery which Samson had founded.⁵³ Yet Dol had a problem long before it claimed metropolitan status in the mid-ninth century and commenced its long-running conflict with the archbishops of Tours, or indeed its transformation into a territorial diocese in a Carolingian context *ca* 800, if that is what occurred.⁵⁴ Any bishops at Dol, situated in the far north-east of Brittany rather near to the Roman city of Alet, where there was also a bishop, were clearly intrusive. Unlike its counterpart at Léon, there was not even a claim that the Britons had occupied a deserted Roman city.⁵⁵ Here some consideration of the episcopal context is called for, with a little more flexibility than it often seems to receive. Bishops were originally the leaders of groups of people. Early christian communities, following the urban focus of Roman civilisation, tended to be in cities. With the christianisation of the Roman Empire, the area of authority of bishops came to be coterminous with the Roman *civitates*, city-territories with the bishops in the cities extending their ministry into the surrounding countryside; nevertheless, in certain circumstances this could be differently expressed. Consider this case from ninth-century Cornwall.

Between 833 and 870 a Cornish bishop named Kenstec made a profession of obedience to Archbishop Ceolnoth of Canterbury.⁵⁶ That ‘the episcopal profession was a regular and normal feature in the making of a bishop in the Anglo-Saxon Church at that time’⁵⁷ and the profession of Kenstec is typical of its counterparts in the formulae which it employs only serves to highlight the unusual description of Kenstec’s see. He is ‘humilis licet ad indignus episcopalem sedem in gente Cornubia in monasterio quod lingua Brettonum appellatur [*sic*] Dinuurrin electus’ ‘the humble Kenstec, elected though unworthy to the [or “an”] episcopal seat among the people in Cornwall in the monastery which in the language of the Britons is called Dinuurrin’.

⁵⁰ ProI.1: ‘o beatissime sedis apostolicae episcopo Tigernomagle’; I.50: ‘volentes eum apostolico excipere obsequio’; I.58: ‘cum apostolico ... honore’; I.14, II.2 (twice), II.3. Le Duc, *Vitae Sancti Samsonis*, 16.

⁵¹ *VIS*, I.45: ‘non enim debes in hac patria diutius immorare; peregrinus enim destinatus es atque ultra mare in ecclesia maximus futurus, maximo sacerdotali honore condignus’.

⁵² N.B. *ibid.*: ‘inuitis ac flentibus cunctis congregationibus’ ‘the whole congregation unwilling and weeping’. For more discussion of bishops in *VIS* see Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 19–20.

⁵³ ‘The Lives’, 27–30; quoted phrase at 30.

⁵⁴ See Poulin below, with references.

⁵⁵ *Vita Pauli Aureliani*, 15, edd. Cuissard, ‘Vie de Saint Paul’, 442–3, and Plaine, ‘Vita sancti Pauli’, 239–41.

⁵⁶ Canterbury, Cathedral Library, Register A, fo.292. Cf. Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 51–6.

⁵⁷ Richter (ed.), *Canterbury Professions*, xlviii; for the text see *ibid.*, 24, no.27, and Birch (ed.), *Cartularium*, II.145, no.527.

Nowhere else among these documents is *monasterium* used to designate a see.⁵⁸ Whereas reference to Anglo-Saxon bishops in terms of the particular people in their care is paralleled,⁵⁹ the style of Kenstec is exceptionally vague: he is not really said to be bishop of anything. When next we encounter bishops in Cornwall they are based in St Germans, of which the Cornish name was *Lanalet* or *Lannaled*, not *Dinuurin*, but the title ‘Bishop of St Germans’ is never used. It was ‘episcopium Ealdredi episcopi, id est in prouincia Cornubiae’ ‘the diocese of Bishop Ealdred, that is in the province of Cornwall’ that King Æthelred supported in a charter of 994 and ‘Cornubiensem diocesim’ ‘the Cornish diocese’ that was superseded in the foundation charter of the see of Exeter written somewhat after 1050. The situation of the bishops at St Germans is expressed in interesting ways. According to an Old English letter purporting to be from Archbishop Dunstan to King Æthelred, King Æthelstan gave to Cunan ‘bisceoprice ealswa tamur scæt’ ‘the bishopric as far as the Tamar flowed’ and later King Eadred gave land ‘inn to scē germane to þam bisceopstole’ ‘to St German to the bishop-seat’.⁶⁰ Early modern notes on lost charters of Æthelstan read ‘Erexit in Ecclesiam S. Germani quoddam Conanum Episcopum’ ‘He raised [or set up] a certain Conan as bishop in the church of St Germanus’ and (quoting from the disposition) ‘Omne igitur territorium episcopatus uidelicet Beati Germani Cornubiae regionis Episcopi ...’ ‘Therefore all the territory of the episcopate, viz of Blessed Germanus, bishop of the region of Cornwall ...’.⁶¹

I have no difficulty in seeing Samson, or those presented in *VIS* as his successors, bishops Tigernomaglus and Loucherus (the latter present at a posthumous miracle in II.15), described like Bishop Kenstec. Assuming that *VIS* is correct in asserting that he was already a bishop when he arrived at Dol, it is most unlikely that, after Samson was buried there, his authority was not passed on to another in apostolic succession. There are practical as well as ideological reasons for doing so: bishops are needed to ordain clergy and consecrate churches. Even if Dol was purely a monastery it would need the occasional presence of a bishop to function as Dubricius did at

⁵⁸ Duine early cautioned (reviewing Thomas Taylor’s *The Celtic Christianity of Cornwall* in *Analecta Bollandiana* 31 [1915/16] 575) that the mention of *monasterium* in connection with an episcopal see need not imply the existence of a monastic bishop, a status since increasingly doubted.

⁵⁹ Birch (ed.), *Cartularium*, I.407–8, no.292 (cf. Richter [ed.], *Canterbury Professions*, 3–4, no.3): ‘Scio enim uere quod me tam indignum aeclesiae quae est in prouincia Huuiciorum cum episcopatus officio praeesse iussisti’ ‘For I know in truth that you have ordered me although unworthy to be set over the church which is in the province of the Hwicce with the office of the episcopate’, with pre-Conquest rubric ‘... Uuiciorum Episcopi’. His successors would be bishops of Worcester.

⁶⁰ Working with such material in the study of early medieval Cornwall, I came to prefer the word ‘seat’ for ‘see’ as designating the place from which a bishop ruled, where he had his *cathedra*.

⁶¹ For discussion with references see Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 63 and 74. An erstwhile episcopal presence at *Dinuurin* was not forgotten, assuming that it is correctly identified with Bodmin, for in the foundation-charter of the see of Exeter the diocese of Cornwall is said to have been bestowed ‘in beati Germani memoria atque Petroci [the patron saint of Bodmin] ueneratione’; William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century wrote: ‘Cornubiensium sane pontificum succiduum ordinem nec scio nec appono, nisi quod apud Sanctum Petrocum confessorum fuerit episcopatus sedes ... Quidam dicunt fuisse ad Sanctum Germanum ...’ ‘Indeed I neither know nor contrive the successive order of Cornish bishops, except that the seat of the bishopric was at St Petroc the confessor’s ... Some say that it was at St Germans ...’; and the important charter of Æthelred in 994 mentioned above is best understood as asserting the authority of the Cornish diocese over ‘the place and governance of St Petroc’ (‘locusque atque regimen sancti Petroci’) (see *ibid.*, 74–8). Cf. Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult*, 59–66.

the monasteries of Illtud, Piro, and wherever Samson was consecrated bishop.⁶² A group of migrants might prefer one of their own. The emphasis placed on Samson's episcopal status in his early hagiography, then, was always intended to redound to the prestige and assert the authority of the bishops at Dol. Yet there is more context, and useful analogy, to offer. If Dol, established in a place of no previous importance in a region with some existing ecclesiastical structure, is unusual, the eventual diocese of Dol is very strange, with enclaves in several other dioceses, not to mention that of Pental on the lower Seine.⁶³ Might these irregularities be best explained by the colonial context, the overseas migration of Britons to which Gildas refers?⁶⁴

A little cluster of references from the 460s to groups of Britons in north-west Gaul and another reference dated between 572 and 589 to Britons settled in north-west Spain give some indication of how the ecclesiastical structures of the colonists related to those already in place on the Continent. In 461 Mansuetus, bishop of the Britons, signed the proceedings of the first Council of Tours, the metropolitan see of north-west Gaul.⁶⁵ Unusually, he is the bishop of a people rather than of a city, but his signature indicates that a place had been made for them in the existing church organisation. Slightly later letters show Britons on the edge of Bishop Sidonius Apollinaris' network.⁶⁶ Yet as Roman Gaul crumbled away the Bretons tended to go their own way, eventually settling in sufficient numbers to turn western Armorica into Britannia. Here we find Samson and his hagiography, although *VIS* presents his travels as monastic pilgrimage, not colonisation, possibly more because of the nature of the genre than the reality behind it.⁶⁷

Turning to north-west Spain, the relevant portion of a document known as the *Parochiale* gives brief but clear evidence of British settlement there.⁶⁸ Drawn up between 572 and 589 in connection with ecclesiastical reorganisation carried out by Martin of Braga in the Suevic kingdom, the *Parochiale* is a list of dioceses and the churches belonging to each. It begins with the archiepiscopal see of Braga and ends with this:

Ad sedem Britonorum ecclesias que sunt intro Britones una cum monasterio Maximi et que in Asturiis sunt.

To the see of the Britons – the churches which are among the Britons together with the monastery of Maximus and (the churches) which are in the Asturias.

The last clause is tacked on because the churches in question lay across a traditional boundary from the foregoing: into the region which is still called the Asturias. Thus the *Parochiale* shows that there was a spread of British settlement along the western part of the northern Spanish coast. There were enough Britons to have what the *Parochiale* expresses: churches in more than one region, a monastery, a bishop, and an important impact on ecclesiastical organisation where they settled.

⁶² *VIS*, I.13, 15, 43–4; note his oversight of monasteries in I.33–4, 37.

⁶³ Guillotel, 'Les origines'.

⁶⁴ *De Excidio Britonum*, 25 and 67, ed. and transl. Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 27–8 and 54.

⁶⁵ Haddan & Stubbs (edd.), *Councils*, II.72: 'Mansuetus Episcopus Britannorum interfui et subscripsi' 'I Mansuetus Bishop of the Britons was present and subscribed'.

⁶⁶ *Epistulae*, I.7, III.9, IX.9, ed. & transl. Anderson, I.370–1, II.36–7, 534–5.

⁶⁷ On monastic pilgrimage see especially the study by Wooding below.

⁶⁸ David, *Études historiques*, 44; Thompson, 'Britonia'.

Introduction

The form of the British entry, which comes at the end of the *Parochiale*, is anomalous. Almost all of the other sees listed were the *civitates* of Roman Spain, and the names of these cities are followed by the names of places where their parish churches were located. Yet the identification of the see of the Britons by a people and the lack of names for its churches (though the monastery is named) can be accounted for by unfamiliarity with the immigrants and their settlements, without necessarily reflecting any organisational peculiarities.⁶⁹ Appropriately, the first bishop of the see in Spain of whom we know, coming last among the signatories to the second Synod of Braga in 572, has the regular Brittonic name Mailoc, otherwise found in early medieval Brittany and Cornwall.⁷⁰

The history of north-west Spain at the beginning of the middle ages is exceedingly obscure.⁷¹ All that can be said about the conditions of British settlement is that ecclesiastical organisation apparently never got off the ground in the hinterland north of the Roman cities of Iria Flavia, Lugo, and Astorga; certainly there were no existing coastal centres of importance in the area on which the British settlement was focussed. Such information qualifies but does not remove the British immigrants' achievement of obtaining a recognised place in the overseas ecclesiastical establishment. The situation seems analogous to the north coast of Brittany, where the new British episcopal centres were established.

Such colonies of Catholic Christians were unprecedented in the Roman Church. The colonial past of the Romans was way back in pagan times. In the fifth century Salvian could write of incoming barbarians as either pagans or heretics.⁷² The colonists in question here had monks and clergy, even bishops: a claim to ecclesiastical legitimacy. The establishment of colonial churches might produce oddities in reality and reporting.⁷³ In any case, the colonial context entailed the need for special emphasis on Samson's episcopal credentials in the interests of the bishops at Dol.

New perspectives

So, where have we arrived in our study of the First Life of St Samson of Dol? There is consensus among the contributors of the studies in this volume that an earlier biography, which will be called in the following studies the **Vita primigenia* or just the *primigenia*, existed. As Caroline Brett so aptly puts it: the *VIS* author's claim of this 'was too odd, too individual and too thoroughly woven into the text as a whole to be readily dismissed as a hagiographer's conceit'.⁷⁴ We have not reached consensus about the date of *VIS*. An early (late seventh century to ca 700) rather than a late (late eighth century to ca 800) date is heavily favoured, so that the useful term 'near consensus' is appropriate; however, Joseph-Claude Poulin holds out for the later date

⁶⁹ Comparison is invited with the profession of Bishop Kenstec discussed above. Both concern fringe British areas of a regular diocesan Church, although the Cornish were indigenous, not colonists. David, *Études historiques*, 57–8, considered that the *Parochiale* entry referred to a monastic bishopric of Celtic type, but cf. Thompson, 'Britonia', 203. Merovingian parallels in frontier situations are noted by Brett below, with references.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *Language and History*, 464–5.

⁷¹ The chronicle of Hydatius does not go past the 460s, just the time of that little cluster of first references to Britons further north in Gaul.

⁷² *De Gubernatione Dei*, IV.13 and V.2, ed. Halm, 48 and 56–7.

⁷³ Cf. Olson, 'British and Irish colonial churches'.

⁷⁴ In the blog referred to in n.3 above.

on the basis of the author's use of sources which, he argues, cannot be earlier than the mid-eighth century. See his study below, and the counter-argument about the sources by Constant Mews in his study below. These are the chief contributions of the studies collected here toward addressing the problems and realising the opportunities presented by the First Life of St Samson of Dol, but there are others.

Richard Sowerby's study is a clear and straightforward demonstration of how *VIS* can be used in historical investigation. While acknowledging that there is much that *VIS* does not tell us, he selects a topic on which it is informative: the family of Samson. Remarkably, this is a subject relating to both the lay and ecclesiastical/monastic worlds and the intersection between them. Showing how Samson's family has a sustained presence in *VIS*, Sowerby considers why this should be so. Concern for family reputation is linked to early development of the cult of St Samson. Here there is some restatement of Sowerby's analysis of the text of *VIS* discussed above, and this is a reason why his study is placed next in the volume. Another is that his is the only one to approach, tentatively it is true, the subject of the saint himself.

Joseph-Claude Poulin analyses the text of *VIS* as a system of information, examining where and how this was obtained at every stage. Readers (even Francophones) are initially referred to the prefixed English summary and appended flow-chart which bracket a meticulous and logical study that will help to sort out the text of *VIS* even if one does not accept all of the conclusions. There is some difference of opinion with Sowerby over whether the **Vita primigenia* can be reconstructed from its *réécriture* in *VIS*, with Poulin identifying significant content of the latter that was not in the former. His study locates *VIS* comprehensively in the secondary literature! It concludes with some consideration of the evidence of *VIS* for the history of Brittany and Dol in particular.

Caroline Brett's study points out the verbal borrowings of *VIS* from another saint's Life, the *Vita Paterni* (see Table 4.1), and in so doing provides much-needed context for the early hagiography of St Samson of Dol. St Paternus was a mid-sixth-century bishop of Avranches whose Life was written by Venantius Fortunatus later in that century. Brett's finding that this source was used in the **Vita primigenia* and both the First and Second Lives of St Samson is one of the most interesting in our book. The sustained comparison that she makes between the neighbouring cults of Samson and Paternus (Avranches is less than 50 km east of Dol) reveals the historical (cultural, ecclesiastical, political) setting there. This is the first of several studies (followed by Wood's, Mews' and to a limited extent Wooding's) to draw attention to the impact of the Irish *peregrinus* St Columbanus on Continental monasticism in the seventh century, arguably a context for the production of *VIS*.

Ian Wood's study is all about the Continental context. This contains a full discussion of the signature of Samson to the proceedings of the Council of Paris (556×573), including an argument for its closer dating to 561. The relationship of Columbanus to (specifically south-east) Brittany and Britons at the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh centuries is then considered in detail. The study returns to Samson's career on the Continent and especially his monastic foundation of Pental at the mouth of the River Seine in Merovingian France. It concludes with a comparison of Samson and Columbanus, who is presented as following, and eventually overshadowing, an earlier British ascetic tradition of Samson and others.

In an original approach, Constant Mews compares *VIS* to a text, the *Ratio de cursu* or *Explanation about the liturgies*, from a time when Columbanian monasticism was itself being overshadowed. Written perhaps in the mid-eighth century, the *Ratio* defensively asserts the apostolic authority of both the Irish and Gallican liturgies

which were coming under pressure of Roman liturgical practices. Samson is in a somewhat different earlier world as presented by *VIS*, in which liturgy is important to Samson but the stress is on his apostolic authority as bishop in a defensive assertion to the Gallican church. Drawing on his wide knowledge of medieval intellectual history, Mews points to how *VIS* situates Samson in an Eastern tradition mediated through Gaul, arguing that its lack of references to Augustine or Gregory's *Dialogues* is again a sign of its earlier date. He makes an interesting suggestion that the Irish episode in *VIS* as well as its emphasis on Samson's learning may have been intended to impress the Irish on the Continent.

Jonathan Wooding's study refocuses attention on Britain: on Wales and Cornwall. It provides the monastic context for *VIS* and its saint, with special attention to *peregrinatio*, ascetic self-exile. Characteristically, Wooding includes the historiographical context for his subjects, too. Samson's progression up the spiritual ladder from less to more rigorous cenobitic, then to eremitic monasticism, and finally to monastic *peregrinatio* is thoroughly analysed, including identification of the places involved. Samson's journey across Cornwall attracts particular discussion, including a critique of the notion of 'peninsular roads' to which it arguably gave rise. Identification of Samson as the first Insular *peregrinus* touches on the subject of the Britons as forerunners to the Irish in Continental monasticism.

Finally, Karen Jankulak addresses the paradox of St Samson in Wales, where so much of the action of *VIS* takes place but from where his cult was virtually to disappear. Her study provides what will surely be the definitive documentation of evidence for Samson in Wales, and includes due consideration of Cornwall and even a little of Ireland. Considerable attention is given to sorting out Samson place-names and whether they refer to the saint or the Old Testament strongman, complicated by the latter's application to giants. In examining the evidence of *VIS* for Samson in Wales, Jankulak expresses doubt as to whether events there were really less of a focus for its source, the **Vita primigenia*, than the monastery that Samson founded in Cornwall; and poses the question of the relationship of hagiography to cult: would a saint who left Wales be remembered there for long? In both of these respects readers are invited to link hers back to Sowerby's study.

Thus investigations arising from particular interests of the contributors have come together happily to advance scholarship on the First Life of St Samson of Dol.⁷⁵ This has progressed a long way since Fawtier searched the text for 'faits proprements historiques',⁷⁶ not least in greatly expanding the scope of what are considered to be proper subjects for historical study. Some of these have hardly been touched on in the present volume; for example, the sermon for delivery on the feast of St Samson in book II would repay careful examination.

It is hoped that in future the findings of this present volume can be built upon and extended: for example, with consideration of whether the *primigenia*-text can be distinguished within *VIS* by comparative linguistic analysis, the relationship between the see of Dol and its neighbour Alet (Saint-Malo) and between the cults of their two patron saints, the transformation of hagiography more generally between the seventh and eighth centuries, links between Brittany and Ireland and especially

⁷⁵ Recent progress in scholarship on the subject has of course also been made by others, including Thomas Charles-Edwards (*Wales and the Britons*, 19, 23, 26, 66–7, 186, 189, 238–9, 625), Magali Coumert ('Le peuplement de l'Armorique'), and the late Bernard Merdrignac in numerous works (see Bibliography below).

⁷⁶ Quoted from Fawtier, 'Saint Samson', 170.

Wales, and Samson (and other Britons in Armorica) as part of Frankish history. The essays collected here, though, aim to provide a secure foundation for such work, and to stimulate interest in this crucial primary source for Celtic history.

A FAMILY AND ITS SAINT IN THE *VITA PRIMA SAMSONIS*

Richard Sowerby

The considerable efforts made to understand the sources and dating of the *Vita prima Samsonis* (*VIS*) have always been motivated by the hope that the Life, if shown to be a well-founded document based on the real accounts of contemporaries, might ‘help to light up a very dark corner of the darkest period of European history’.¹ Scholars given to more effusive evaluations of their source material have even gone as far as to liken the *VIS* to ‘the beam from a powerful lighthouse travel[ling] over the waves of a bay at night’, illuminating with momentary clarity a sixth-century world otherwise barely visible to the historian.² In truth, however, what the Life offers is more like a series of spotlights than a constant beam. The saint’s career is related through a series of vignettes, constrained for the most part by the walls of the monasteries and hermitages which briefly house him or which are founded by him. Although the Life accompanies the saint on the road as he moves through the religious houses of Wales, Ireland, and Cornwall, any wider world that surrounds these ecclesiastical outposts remains almost entirely unseen. Only in its final chapters, describing Samson’s deeds in Brittany and Francia, do secular power structures and local politics attract the Life’s attention. Chris Wickham may be correct to suggest that this contrast between the Insular and the Continental sections of the *VIS* ‘may tell us something about the evanescence of British kingship’ in this period, but the Life’s indifference to secular society extends beyond the political.³ The saint’s travels around the British Isles seem almost deliberately to avoid interaction with laymen. Their sole intrusion comes in the form of a highly stylized encounter with a crowd of idol-worshippers in Cornwall, an episode primarily intended to reflect badly on the existing churches of that region which, as a Cornish monk had already confessed to him, ‘have become lax in [their] previous ways’.⁴ Other excursions occasionally presented him with further adversaries to overcome – sorceresses, serpents, and demoniacs – but these meetings also took place beyond the fringes of ordinary society, in remote forests or beside solitary coastal huts.⁵ Whatever light the *VIS* does offer to the historian, a great deal nevertheless remains in the shadows.

¹ Burkitt, ‘St Samson’, 45.

² Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?*, 218.

³ Wickham, *The Inheritance*, 150–1.

⁴ *VIS*, I.46–50 (ed. Flobert, 213–20): ‘hoc enim scire te uolo iam in nostris prioribus institutis laxamur’; on which see Sowerby, ‘The Lives’, 27–8.

⁵ *VIS*, I.26–7, 32, and 52 (ed. Flobert, 184–8, 192–6, and 222).

We ought to find it remarkable, therefore, that we know anything at all about the family into which Samson was born. The *Vita*'s disregard for anything beyond Samson's own trajectory through the ecclesiastical ranks, or his simultaneous progress against an increasingly diverse array of supernatural opponents, might well have inclined the hagiographer to pass over any seemingly mundane background details about his family connections. In fact, the reverse was true. The Life retains an interest in Samson's parents, siblings and relations that goes far beyond the norms of the hagiographic genre. Although Robert Bartlett is right to say that 'the narrative of a saint's life was deeply shaped by whether the saint's family was supportive or obstructive' with regard to their holy child's chosen path, hagiographers only sustained an interest in the continued dealings of the saint and the family if they had to.⁶ Many regarded the saint's entry into the religious life as a convenient point at which to drop their biological families from the narrative – and indeed, often made a great deal of this supposed break with their kin. Part of 'the problem of female sanctity', as Julia Smith has put it, was that events in the lives of sainted women generally offered their hagiographers fewer opportunities to safely dispose of the saint's family in this manner.⁷ Lifelong contact with one's family provided an inevitable challenge for a genre which still looked to the example of the desert monk Anthony and the other male figures whose reputation had been based precisely on the rejection of earthly kinship.

The *VIS* does not initially indicate that it will deviate from the established *topoi* of male sanctity, and in fact appears in its early chapters to be doing all it can to align its saint with those norms. The initial interest which the hagiographer shows in Samson's parents seems confined to their role as conduits for revelations about their son, for the visions and prophecies which attend the saint's birth all look forward 'to the proper time when you will hand him over to become acquainted with the teachings of God'.⁸ Yet no sooner does Samson make the foretold break from his kin than they are reintroduced, remaining closely connected with him for years to come. The Life tells us that Samson oversaw his own relatives' entry into the monastic life, helped them establish a niche for themselves on the ecclesiastical landscape of sixth-century Britain, and liberally rewarded them with both lands and titles. In this paper, I hope to show how the Life of St Samson tried simultaneously to uphold its saint as a committed ascetic who had turned his back on his well-connected family, while acknowledging that those same family members would gain preferment from Samson in matters of ecclesiastical office and inheritance. The Life's solution was to draw attention to the family's entry into the religious life, describing a well-nigh miraculous scene in which mother, father, aunt, uncle, cousins, and siblings had 'on one and the same day been won for Christ'.⁹ Understanding why that scene plays such a central role in the Life may in turn, I suggest, cast some light of its own onto the early emergence of St Samson's cult.

⁶ Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 529; cf. also Theis, 'Saints sans famille?'.

⁷ Smith, 'The problem', 25–8. For the response of other *uitae* which had to preserve the *topoi* of renunciation while praising individuals who maintained contact with their kin, see also de Jong, *In Samuel's Image*, 220–4.

⁸ *VIS*, I.5 (ed. Flobert, 152): 'nam primus partus tuus summus a Deo sacerdos destinatus est et hunc ut edes Samsonem uocabis, et postea legitimo tempore trades eum Dei disciplinis discendis'.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I.30 (ed. Flobert, 190): 'frater eiusdem Amonis hoc uidens, una cum sua uxore ac tribus suis filiis, tali sorte ac tali uictoria, sub uno eodemque die, Christo et ipsi lucrati sunt'.

When messengers arrived at the island monastery of Caldey, bearing news from Samson's bedridden father, their attempt to renew contact between the saint and his family did not go well. Samson himself had only recently come to the island, attracted by the promise of a stricter way of life under Abbot Piro.¹⁰ The suggestion that he compromise the rigour of his new home by being drawn back into family affairs was not, therefore, appealing. 'Unless I am mistaken,' he told them, 'I have already left Egypt.'¹¹ It was an economical piece of monastic hyperbole that expressed Samson's complete withdrawal from the world: the saint would no more wish to return to his earthly home than would the biblical Israelites seek again the land of their ancient captivity. In truth, the young Samson had hardly had to endure it for long, for his parents had left him at the monastery of St Iltut when he was around five years old. His hagiographer observed that on that day, the boy had shown no distress nor even cried to be separated from his parents.¹² If he spoke of his 'father' at all during his childhood, his words were meant spiritually rather than literally. Iltut had once misunderstood that, and was dumbfounded when his pupil immediately corrected him: 'Do you not know, elect master, that I have no father than he of whom it is said by the prophet, "Your hands made me and fashioned me"?'¹³ Although the *VIS* offers no prolonged comment on its saint's personal renunciation of worldly society, these short rebukes and corrections were intended to be revealing. Despite the young age at which he had been given into the monastic life, Samson's conversations had always marked him out as one who strove after its ideals with absolute sincerity and commitment.

At this point, the reader might justifiably feel that they have heard this story before. It was a cliché of early medieval hagiographers to insist simultaneously on the respectable, often aristocratic, families into which their saints were born, and on the circumstances which nevertheless led holy men and women eventually to reject the secular *mores* of their kinsmen. The theme had obvious biblical foundation, for Christ himself had promised that 'every one that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for the sake of my name, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting'.¹⁴ His words came easily to the minds of monastic writers. Indeed, when the Life of St Samson was rewritten by a monk of Dol in the 860s, the writer imagined Samson himself repeating them to the Frankish king, Childebert I, who demanded to know why the holy man had left Britain and started to meddle in affairs on the Continent: 'I heard

¹⁰ See *VIS*, I.20–1 (ed. Flobert, 178–80). For Caldey Island as the site of the *insula Pironis*, see Wooding, 'Island and coastal churches', 205–11, and below.

¹¹ *VIS*, I.24 (ed. Flobert, 182): 'et respondentibus sibi ait: "Repedate ad domum uestram, iam enim nisi fallor Aegyptum reliqui, non est enim meum iter in id ipsum; potens est enim Deus egrotantem sanare."'

¹² *Ibid.*, I.10 (ed. Flobert, 162).

¹³ *Ibid.*, I.12 (ed. Flobert, 164): 'Sanctus autem Samson ita subridens responsum reddidit: "Ignoras tu, electe magister, quia nullum ego patrem alium habeo nisi illum de quo per prophetam dicitur "Manus tuae fecerunt me et plasmauerunt me"?' Magister itaque, hoc audito, stupefactus et admirans.' The quotation is Job 10:8, although the sentiment is that of Matt. 23:9.

¹⁴ Matt. 19:29. Cf. Mark 10:29–30; Luke 14:26.

this said in the gospel,' the saint explained, 'and I listened.'¹⁵ The ninth-century hagiographer made it his business to insert New Testament wisdom into the mouth of St Samson throughout the *Vita secunda Samsonis* (*VIIS*) wherever he could, but he seems to have thought that Christ's injunctions about the rejection of family were especially appropriate to Samson's life. Certainly, he extended another scene from the *VIS* to similar effect, concerning the time when St Winniau had met St Samson outside the monastery of Docco (Lanow) and unadvisedly asked Samson where he was going:

St Samson gave a humble reply, saying: 'O brother, I am amazed at you for running over with such stupidity, asking the reason for my journey and where I am headed, when it is written in the gospel: "Whoever has left father or mother, or children, or sisters, or brothers, or lands for the sake of my name, shall receive a hundredfold, and in the future shall possess life everlasting." Behold the place to which I am heading, made plain.'¹⁶

From the perspective of the ninth-century Breton hagiographer, these biblical statements evidently seemed like fitting encapsulations of Samson's career. He was rewriting the saint's Life to say more about Samson's deeds in Brittany and neighbouring Francia, making the foundation of Dol the true culmination of Samson's earthly achievements. With every new miracle-story he added to the *Vita Samsonis*, all of them set on the Continent, the land of Samson's birth retreated ever further into the background. The effect, incidentally, was to make the life of St Samson like that of many other early medieval saints, who had been born into wealth and high status yet who had progressively rid themselves of family ties to seek a new spiritual life elsewhere.

In the *VIS*, however, the relationship between family and saint was somewhat different. All the usual appeals to high birth were made in the Life's opening chapters, which recorded that the family into which Samson was born had previously held the honour of fostering the sons of kings. His father, Amon, was himself the son of court officials in the kingdom of Dyfed, while Samson's mother, Anna, belonged to a family of equivalent rank in neighbouring Gwent.¹⁷ Although earlier antiquarian scholars were mistaken to suppose that Samson himself was a direct descendent of some other royal line – conflating Amon, father of St Samson, with the 'Annhun, rex Grecorum' of later Welsh genealogies – the Life left no doubt that Samson was descended from

¹⁵ *VIIS*, II.4 (ed. Plaine, 124): 'audiui replicare euangelium in quo dicitur: "Quicumque non dimiserit patrem aut matrem aut sorores aut fratres, et omnia quae habuerit, non est me dignus" ... Et ego hoc audiens, omnia mea reliquens, peregrinationem subiens, nauigationem tenens, prospero cursu, Deo donante, in Brittonum patriam deueni.' The cited injunction conflates Matt. 19:29 with Matt. 10:37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I.15 (ed. Plaine, 107), quoting Matt. 19:29: 'At sanctus Sanson humiliter responsum dedit, dicens: "O frater, miror te cur in tanta stultitia incurristi inquirens causam itineris mei, et quo tendam interrogans, cum in euangelio scriptum est: "Quicumque dimiserit patrem aut matrem, aut filios, aut sorores, aut fratres, aut agros propter nomen meum, centuplum accipiet, et uitam aeternam in futuro possidebit." Ecce locum, quo tendo, manifestaui.'"

¹⁷ *VIS*, I.1 and 6 (ed. Flobert, 146 and 154). For the political geography of Dyfed and Gwent in this period, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 18–20.

two of the most prominent families of two separate Welsh kingdoms.¹⁸ But while Samson's elevated pedigree conformed to hagiographic expectations, his subsequent career could hardly be said to have uncomplicatedly fulfilled Christ's exhortation for the faithful to leave their earthly kin behind them. The saint of the *VIS* did not cite that biblical imperative at all, and this earlier version of the Life in fact seems rather more interested in showing how Samson's extended family eventually succeeded in re-establishing contact with its saintly son. As a youth, Samson had impressed his masters with his absolute severance from his parents and their world, and the first part of his Life duly traced the saint's continuing search for more withdrawn locations in which to lead 'a wonderful, solitary and above all heavenly life'.¹⁹ Yet as soon as this was done, the *VIS* sought to rationalize this with the fact that Samson actually ended up spending the remainder of his years in the British Isles once more in the continual presence of his relations.

The *VIS* explains that Samson's father, Amon, was struck by a sudden illness one winter, and was urged to receive communion to prepare himself for an approaching death. Amon, however, declared that he would only accept these final rites from Samson himself, and riders were swiftly dispatched to summon the son to his father's bedside. As we have seen, the saint protested that he had 'already left Egypt' and saw no reason to accede to Amon's request, until his abbot – 'moved by pity, or rather by the Holy Spirit' – indicated to him that this might be an ideal opportunity to perform God's work by extending spiritual care to souls still caught in the sinful world beyond the monastery.²⁰ Samson's journey back to his family home was not an easy one, and he faced supernatural opposition on his way, but as soon as he came to his father's bedside, it was apparent that Abbot Piro had been correct. Amon lay in a state of contrition, and made a true and much delayed confession before announcing that he intended to dedicate the rest of his life to the service of God. His wife, Anna, then declared that not only would she follow him into the religious life, but so too would their six children. Their resolve spurred Amon's brother, Umbraphel, to make a similar commitment, together with his wife and their three sons. The riches of this aristocratic family were to provide for the immediate foundation of new monasteries and churches, along with a generous donation to the poor, overseen by Anna and Afrella, Anna's sister and Umbraphel's wife.²¹ Umbraphel himself, along with a rejuvenated Amon, accompanied Samson back to the monastery on Caldey Island. They sought thereafter 'to live with him always', although it so happened

¹⁸ Mention of Samson's supposed royal descent was at one time commonly found, probably deriving from the notice in William Owen Pughe's biographical survey concerning 'Samson, the son of Amwn Ddu king of Graweg in Llydaw': *The Cambrian Biography*, 312. The most imaginatively extended treatment of this alleged 'Amwn Ddu', taken as an historical figure on the basis of the forged manuscripts of Iolo Morganwg, was published in the first volume of Baring-Gould and Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints*, I.153–7. The error had been realized by the publication of the fourth volume (IV.440), when it had been recognized that the historical genealogies recorded instead Annhun/Annwn [=Antonius], 'rex Grecorum': cf. now Bartrum (ed.), *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, 11, 14, 17–18, and 58.

¹⁹ *VIS*, I.21 (ed. Flobert, 180): 'Admirabilem atque heremiticam immo et caelestem uitam infatigabiliter ducens, non diebus, non noctibus, ab orationibus et a conloquiis Dei cessabat.'

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I.22–4 (ed. Flobert, 180–4): 'sanctus uero Piro, misericordia motus, immo spiritu sancto ordinante opem ad uirtutem ostensam, leniter reuocans eum ad se, dixit ei: "Quare sic dicis, electe Dei? Non enim neglegenter facere debes opus Dei; curam enim te oportet habere de animarum profectu; nam merces tua grandis erit cum Deo, dum ubi carnalia creuerunt spiritalia per te seminantur."'

²¹ *Ibid.*, I.29–31 (ed. Flobert, 188–92).

that Umbraphel eventually received a monastery of his own from his nephew; Amon, on the other hand, followed his son on his later travels through Wales and Cornwall until he too was appointed to the abbacy of his own house, taking charge of Samson's foundation in Cornwall before the saint departed for Brittany.²² Samson continued to receive his kinsmen in these last years in the British Isles, admitting into his Cornish monastery one of Umbraphel's sons, who was raised to the diaconate and who soon accompanied Samson on his voyage across the Channel.²³ The rest of the family, with the exception only of his young sister, persevered together in Wales, and Samson himself oversaw their spiritual progress after his elevation to the episcopate, consecrating their churches and condemning his sister for abandoning her mother.²⁴ Although he had once disowned his family, this extended network of parents, siblings, and cousins appears on the basis of the *VIS* to have remained a major part of his life, first during his time as a priest at the monastery of Caldey, then as its abbot, and still further as an itinerant bishop.

The progress of Samson's family is readily apparent to any reader of the *Life*, but I extract it here to highlight just how fully the *VIS* documents their movements and achievements. If the *Life* had restricted itself to the central episode in this tale, describing the circumstances in which members of an extended kin-group followed one of their number into the religious life, then there would have been little to distinguish it from any of the other early medieval *uitae* which related similar events. A monk in the eighth-century *Life* of St Fintán of Clonenagh, a man named Sinchell, claimed to have spent many years trying to persuade his father and foster-father to confess their sins, to give up their possessions and to serve God aright. He remained unsuccessful, until the 'miserable death' of Sinchell's natural father spurred his foster-father to finally turn his back on the world.²⁵ Further afield, and perhaps more reminiscent of events in St Samson's *Life*, the Byzantine saint Euthymios the Younger abandoned his entire family as a young man, but eventually managed to convert his mother, his sisters and his former wife to the religious life when he resumed contact with them by letter, fifteen years later.²⁶

Stories such as these could serve hagiographers in different ways: providing them with an opportunity to juxtapose the salvation of a penitent layman with the damnation of his unshriven fellows, in the case of the *Vita Fintani*; or allowing them to show how even rather withdrawn and remote ascetics could succeed in winning new souls for the Lord, as St Euthymios's biographer did. The interest of the *VIS*'s account of St Samson's family, however, is that it is neither wholly reducible to this kind of functional or rhetorical utility, nor adequately explained in terms of simple reportage. The family's place in the *Life* hinges upon a story about penitence and personal conversation which is, as we shall see, extremely stylized and carefully framed, and yet the continued presence of Samson's relatives in the rest of the narrative simultaneously threatens to undermine the *VIS*'s opening conceit about the saint's early determination to make an absolute break with his earthly kin. The fact that the *Life* opened itself to this potential difficulty suggests that Samson's familial

²² *Ibid.*, I.40 and 52 (ed. Flobert, 204 and 222).

²³ *Ibid.*, I.52 (ed. Flobert, 222).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I.45 (ed. Flobert, 212). For the excommunication of Samson's sister, see below.

²⁵ *Vita sancti Fintani*, ch. 11 (ed. Heist, 148–9); on which see now Sperber, "'Late, and not of special distinction'?"

²⁶ Basil of Thessalonike, *Life of St Euthymios the Younger*, chs 14–16 (ed. Petit, 180–2). I am grateful to Alice-Mary Talbot for allowing me to consult her new translation of the *Life* before publication; my comments draw also on her article, 'The Byzantine family'.

connections were something which the hagiographer felt compelled to justify. We need, therefore, to understand why that should have been the case.

Amon and Umbraphel

As soon as the *VIS* reintroduced Samson's family, it sought to assure its readers that the saint's earlier attitude towards the bonds of secular loyalty had not changed as a result. After he brought his father and uncle to the monastery on Caldey Island, Samson was said to have guarded continually against the assumption that old family relationships would now be preserved and replicated in an ecclesiastical environment. He delivered reminders to that effect to Amon and Umbraphel, instructing them that the presence or absence of kinsmen ought to have no bearing on their choice of habitation, for 'it was not allowed for them to follow their carnal feelings' in such matters. He need not have worried, for Umbraphel affirmed to him that 'we have already, at your suggestion, forsaken all carnal feelings' and that he now clove to his nephew 'not carnally, but spiritually'.²⁷ Seeing that the old ties of blood had truly been abandoned, the nephew duly elevated his uncle to the priesthood and bestowed upon him the abbacy of a newly acquired monastery in Ireland.

Prefacing the account of the handover of Samson's unnamed Irish monastery with speeches in which first the donor, and then the recipient, reaffirmed their mutual disregard for family ties was intended to emphasize that Umbraphel's rapid progress through the ecclesiastical ranks had not been prompted by any underlying nepotism. On one level, the exchange is rather like the conventional proclamations of unworthiness which regularly issue from the mouths of saints in early medieval hagiography: a simple reassertion of a holy man's unfailingly spiritual and pious concerns. But Umbraphel's elevation is just the first of several such instances in which the *VIS* shows Samson busily bestowing ecclesiastical offices or responsibilities upon his relatives. We later discover, therefore, that a newly arrived cousin who made the journey from Wales to visit Samson was soon made a deacon for his trouble; and that Samson's father Amon was, like his brother Umbraphel, appointed to the abbacy of one of Samson's monasteries, this time the saint's own foundation in Cornwall.²⁸ If Samson made similar provisions for followers who were not also his kin, his hagiographer found no reason to record them. It is in this context that the exchange between Umbraphel and Samson attains a more pointed meaning. At the first of its three accounts of family appointment, the *VIS* was going out of its way to deny that this apparent pattern of preferment had anything to do with the 'carnal feelings' either of Samson or of his kin. It presented not so much a story about a single monastery changing hands – for, as Pádraig Ó Riain notes, there is little about Samson's alleged dealings with this unidentified Irish house which rises above generalization, stereotype,

²⁷ *VIS*, I.40 (ed. Flobert, 204): 'Rogantibus se supradictis duobus fratribus, ut cum illo semper habitarent ... dicebat autem illis Samson non licere eos carnales in eum affectus sequi. Dicebat namque auunculus eius: "Scis tu, electe Dei, quod te suggerente omnes carnales reliquimus et ideo quia tu spiritalis es, non te carnaliter, sed spiritaliter sequi debemus."'

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.52 (ed. Flobert, 222).

or convention²⁹ – but, rather, an emblematic comment on the care which Samson is said to have taken when involving family members in matters of ecclesiastical promotion and inheritance.

It is curious to note that, just as the Life went out of its way to deny that worldly nepotism had ever motivated Samson's habit of granting offices and authority to his relatives, it also described the fate of a second ecclesiastical family which had erred in the opposite direction. The ruin which they almost suffered could not have been more dissimilar to the rise of Samson's own pious relations.³⁰ The story went that in the monastery of Llantwit Major, Samson's first religious home, were two brothers. They were the nephews of the abbot Ilut, and hoped that the family connection assured their eventual inheritance of the monastery. Their expectation seemed threatened by the esteem in which the young Samson was held by the community, and drove them to envious hatred: they searched fruitlessly to uncover some evil intent in Samson, and the one who held a priestly office 'grew afraid that, because of St Samson, he would be robbed and deprived of his hereditary monastery which he hoped to possess after his uncle'.³¹ They conspired ultimately to poison Samson, and although their plan failed the envious priest who had instigated it was seized by a demon which, according to 'the swift judgement of God out of heaven', first induced him to madness and then almost killed him when St Samson drove it from his body. These events held an undoubted hagiographical interest, since Samson's immunity to the poison and his successful exorcism of the demoniac priest were both to be understood as miraculous. But we might also wonder if, given the care with which the Life distinguished the 'carnal' and the 'spiritual' motivations of kin-groups who entered into the religious life, this story was intended to comment on dangers of presuming that ties of blood held any relevance to the distribution of ecclesiastical offices. It was a cautionary tale about the lengths to which human beings might go when they gave in to 'the poisonous incentive of envy', but the original fault which made the two brothers vulnerable to its effects had been the presumption that their uncle's monastery was 'a hereditary worldly possession'.³² The expectation was more than simply misguided. It was both sinful and irreligious, as the hagiographer reiterated at the conclusion of the tale: 'And so it happened, by God's just judgement, that while [the envious priest] had invidiously and unjustly claimed dominion over [the monastery], never in his whole life did he hold it.'³³

There is thus a shared moral message which underpins both what the Life has to say about the ecclesiastical careers of Samson's relatives, and what it has to say

²⁹ Ó Riain, 'Samson alias San(c)tán?', 320–1. Ó Riain proposes that certain features of the Irish episode are best explained in a ninth-century context, which leads him to favour a late date for the Life as a whole (and not, as I previously stated, the episode as an interpolation: *contra* Sowerby, 'The Lives', 24, n.121). The reasons given on page 569 of that volume, in his accompanying book review, do not however seem sufficiently incompatible with an earlier date to comprise a dating criterion.

³⁰ *VLS*, I.14–19 (ed. Flobert, 168–78).

³¹ *Ibid.*, I.16 (ed. Flobert, 172): 'metuens ipse ne propter sanctum Samsonem a suo hereditario priuaretur ac destitueretur monasterio, quod post suum auunculum sperabat possidere, aequaliter cum fratre suo per suas artes malum consilium querebant'.

³² *Ibid.*, I.17 (ed. Flobert, 174): 'Postmodum cum increpatione ueniens dixit: "Peccauius, frater, nil in aliquem hominem, sed in Christum atque in eius dilectum Samsonem; et tu, frater, uenenoso liuoris incentiuo in tuam animam perfusus es."'.

³³ *Ibid.*, I.19 (ed. Flobert, 178): 'Sicque iusto Dei iudicio actum est ut, dum ille inuidiose iniusteque usurpabat primatum, in tota uita ua numquam habuit.'

about the other family groups within the Church. One wonders if this reveals only the personal preoccupation of the author; or whether the *VIS* sought to create deliberate echoes between its stories, the two sinful brothers and their failure to hold on to their family's monastery intentionally juxtaposed with the two righteous brothers, Amon and Umbraphel, who gained lands and titles from their saintly nephew for showing no such presumption. Thematic juxtapositions of a similar kind certainly abound in the elaborate framing for the conversion of that second pair of brothers, some features of which have already been drawn out by the late Bernard Merdrignac.³⁴ He observed that, although the *Life* was generally vague about the passage of time, the story about how Samson's family turned from the world to the cloister was fixed precisely to an appropriate part of the liturgical year: the penitential season of Lent. By so doing, the hagiographer was quietly amplifying the repentant mood of his protagonists – particularly that of Samson's father Amon, whose first stirrings of remorse thus began 'some time in winter', and whose final entry into the monastic life took place during 'the forty days of Easter which had now begun'.³⁵ The season was not only appropriate, it was also filled with other events designed to draw attention to the enormity of Amon's confession. On his way to his father's bedside, St Samson found his way blocked by an old woman armed with a bloody trident who attacked his companion and left him for dead. When Samson questioned her, he found that she was one of a strange group of forest-dwelling women shunned by the rest of human society and devoted to evil deeds. Her account of herself possesses curious parallels with other enigmatic pieces of medieval literature that cannot detain us here,³⁶ for the *Life*'s interest in this woman who called herself a *theomacha* ('enemy of God') had less to do with her background than with her moral state:

The saint said to her: 'Can you not return the monk whom you struck to life again, or at least stir yourself for the good of your soul?' But in reply, she said 'I neither will nor can restore anything to goodness, for I can do no good thing. From my childhood to this day, I have always given myself to wickedness.' And so St Samson rightly said, 'I implore Almighty God that you do no more harm; but provided that there is no cure for you, then you must die in that same hour.' And as the prayer was completed, that evil woman was thrown headlong to the left, fell to the ground and was dead.³⁷

³⁴ Merdrignac, 'Une course en char'.

³⁵ *VIS*, I.22 (ed. Flobert, 180): 'Quodam itaque tempore hiemis, cum pater eiusdem sancti Samsonis, repentino arreptus dolore'; I.33 (ed. Flobert, 196): 'Tum hi omnes ... iter peregre itauerunt, adque ad monasterium cum prosperitate, die tertio, Domino comitante, peruenerunt. Ibi et supradictus Dubricius episcopus, quippe in sua domo commanebat, initiante iam quadragesima paschae.' Cf. Merdrignac, 'Une course en char', 158.

³⁶ *VIS*, I.26–7 (ed. Flobert, 184–8). Despite Merdrignac's reasons for associating the *theomacha* with traditions relating to the biblical giants ('Une course en char', 148–52), altogether closer comparisons are offered by other accounts of 'supernatural armed women' in early medieval texts, from the British Isles and further afield: the fullest discussion is presently Hall, 'The Meanings', 174–9; but see also Sims-Williams, 'The early Welsh Arthurian poems', 44–5; and Lapidge, *The Cult*, 275, n.118.

³⁷ *VIS*, I.27 (ed. Flobert, 188): 'Sanctus uero dixit: "Numquid potes tu fratrem quem percussisti reiiduum iterum reddere uel certe de animae tuae profectu sollicitare?" At ipsa respondens dixit: "Nolo nec possum in melius reparari, bonum enim nullum facere queo; de mea infantia hucusque ad mala semper exercitata sum." Sanctum autem Samson ita conpetenter dixit: "Deum omnipotentem imploro ne amplius iniuriam facias, sed dum inremediabilis es, ea hora moriaris." Atque oratione completa, malefica illa mulier, saltum praecipitem in latere sinistro dans, ad terram corruit et mortua est.'

This was not the only time that Samson's words brought death to his opponents. Two encounters with monstrous serpents ended with the saint commanding the creatures 'in the name of Jesus Christ to die in our presence at this very hour'.³⁸ To the *theomacha*, however, Samson first sought to establish whether or not the strange woman was capable of salvation, asking her to attend 'to the good of [her] soul'. When she refused, deeming correction an impossibility, he offered up her fate to God, imploring (*implorare*) and praying (*orare*) that death would follow if there was indeed no hope for redemption. Although the woman's demise proved to be immediate, this was not strictly because Samson himself had killed her, as he killed serpents with his words. It was God's own demonstration that the continued existence of an 'irredeemable' soul with no hope of moral correction (*inremediabilis*) served no purpose.

Having shown its readers the swift and terrible judgement of God which might fall upon the continually negligent and unrepentant soul, the *VIS* brought St Samson at last to his father's bedside. Here, a second sinner faced up to his misdeeds, but with a wholly different outcome. The *theomacha* declared that her actions were incapable of redemption, and her death followed swiftly; Amon on the other hand confessed to 'a principal mortal sin which he had kept hidden within himself [...] and vowed that he would serve God with all his heart', and so found himself marvellously delivered from the sickness which had previously left him 'at death's door'.³⁹ The *Life* does not divulge the nature of Amon's sin, but its readers would hardly have been surprised to learn that the saint's father bore no unblemished soul. Up to this point, the *Vita prima* had been offering small but pointed comments about Amon, noting that he had tried to obstruct Samson's foretold entry into the religious life, that his attempts to interfere with his son's destiny had been condemned by a voice which once threatened him in a dream, and even hinting that he might have practised certain superstitious or divinatory arts.⁴⁰ It may not be insignificant that the ninth-century *VIIIS* played down this aspect of Amon's character, diffusing the first *Life*'s more direct and damning statements about how Amon had once set himself 'against the will and command of God'.⁴¹ One wonders if the *VIS*, in contrast, was deliberately making the most of Amon's dubious moral worth in order to raise the stakes for his eventual conversion at the hands of his son. Certainly, we can see that the moment at which Amon confessed his sins and took spiritual vows had been

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I.32 (ed. Flobert, 196): 'serpenti exclamauit dicens: "Longum est iter nostrum, tu autem uitam amplius non habes et ideo impero ego tibi in nomine Iesu Christi, ut praesentibus nobis in hac hora moriaris."' Cf. also I.50 (ed. Flobert, 220).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I.22 (ed. Flobert, 180): 'patrem suum iam in mortis confinio'; I.29 (ed. Flobert, 190): 'statimque Amon ille capitale crimen ad mortem cum ueniae postulatione ac supplici imploratione, praesentibus illis tribus supradictis, quod in se celauerat publicauit in medium ac Deo ab eodem die usque suum finem seruiturum, suggerente praecipue sua uxore, tot corde deuouit'.

⁴⁰ Amon's actions are reported in *VIS*, I.6–7 (ed. Flobert, 154–6). The presumption that Samson's family home had practised divinatory arts is voiced by Ilut in I.12 (ed. Flobert, 164): 'Tum sanctus Eltutus ... dixit: "Pythonis arte in principio tuo fuisti praemonitus et postea, ueniens ad scolam apud disciplinam Christi, colere uis; non enim conueniens est cum caelesti sapientia mundanam exercere mathematicam."' For the divinatory sense of *mathematica*, and its association with the 'art of Python', see for instance Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, VIII.ix.21–6 (ed. Lindsay, I).

⁴¹ *VIS*, I.6 (ed. Flobert, 154): 'Christi scolam satis adire uoluit, sed pater eius, mutata uice ac peruerso, contra Dei uoluntatem ac dictum, ordine, ex maxime maliuolis consiliariis atque amicis suis ignorantibus totum illud abscondum miraculum quod antea fuisset factum, filium suum fuisse clericum contradicebat'. Cf. *VIIIS*, I.4 (ed. Plaine, 85–6); Amon's 'secret mortal sin' is similarly diminished in *VIIIS*, I.9 (ed. Plaine, 97).

carefully anticipated by the hagiographer, who had given the story an appropriately penitential Lenten setting, and who placed it alongside a contrasting tale about the destruction which God could wreak upon sinners who denied the chance to repent.

The story in context

Bernard Merdrignac argued that this careful framing which the Life constructed around the confession of Amon was intended to offer ‘a meditation on penitential renunciation and monastic asceticism’.⁴² To some extent this must be correct, but we have already seen that the *VIS* was still dwelling on the issue some chapters later, when it began to test and verify the sincerity of the father and uncle who soon gained abbatial positions from St Samson, contrasting their overwhelmingly spiritual motivations with the covetous attitudes of other ecclesiastics who hoped to profit from influential relatives in the Church. That makes the Life’s interest in the story of their conversion seem less like a didactic but detached meditation on a spiritual theme, and rather more like a prolonged and deliberate attempt to dramatize the ecclesiastical path of the two brothers, Amon and Umbraphel.

It is worth asking why such an elaborate framing attends two figures who remain more or less incidental to the story of St Samson’s own spiritual development. Umbraphel in particular, although the Life thought that ‘he seemed in some small way to excel’, swiftly passed out of the narrative to take up duties in Ireland, at a monastery about which the hagiographer knew very little.⁴³ The Cornish monastery in which Amon eventually found himself, however, could not have been more different. As I have argued elsewhere, demonstrating the pre-eminence of that unnamed monastery built by Samson in Cornwall was one of the major concerns of the Life. It sought to show that, despite its relatively recent foundation in a region already densely populated by other religious houses, Samson’s monastery outstripped its neighbours with regard to the rigour and correctness of its way of life.⁴⁴ In this light, there was nothing incidental or extraneous about the figure of Amon, the first successor to the monastery’s founder. The Life stated that it was the Holy Spirit (speaking through St Winniau) which had first instructed Samson to ‘make the power of the Lord manifest in this land before you sail over the sea to Europe’.⁴⁵ It was Amon who would now oversee and maintain this ‘outward sign’ of God’s power:

he [St Samson] gave instructions to his father to oversee that monastery, which was now fully built, and, having brought the miracles which God worked by him in that place to completion, he directed his course towards this side of the sea ...⁴⁶

⁴² Merdrignac, ‘Une course en char’, 158: ‘Ce passage à la vie religieuse d’une famille influente de la société profane s’inscrit dans une méditation sur le renoncement pénitentiel et l’ascèse monastique.’

⁴³ *VIS*, I.40 (ed. Flobert, 204): ‘Umbraphel uel in aliquantulocumque uidebatur praecellere’; Ó Riain, ‘Samson alias San(c)tán?’, 320–1.

⁴⁴ Sowerby, ‘The Lives’, 26–8.

⁴⁵ *VIS*, I.46–7 (ed. Flobert, 212–14): “Te uero tuum iter in pace pergentem oportet uel semel antequam transfretaueris in Europa manifestare ut per te adhuc, antequam desis a nobis corpore, uirtus Domini manifestetur in ista patria.” Audiens autem haec sanctus Samson stupefactus est super doctrinam eius, spiritum sanctum super eum proloqui prouidens.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I.52 (ed. Flobert, 222): ‘ac monasterium illud perfecte constructum suo patri praesulatus praecipiente, consummatisque uirtutibus quae in illa regione per ipsum Deus fecit, nauigationem citra mare secundum suam promissionem, Deo ducente, destinauit’.

This was the final recorded act of Samson's Insular career, explicitly identified as the concluding piece of a divine plan. And yet, not long ago, Amon had been a secular aristocrat from a line of royal courtiers in the kingdom of Dyfed. From the outside, he was far from an obvious candidate for abbatial responsibility. But in a series of carefully plotted episodes, we have watched as this wealthy lord made his transition from sinner to penitent to committed ascetic. The care taken to trace Amon's spiritual progress is ultimately essential to the Life's story of how a new monastery came to establish itself in a land which had 'become lax in its previous ways'.⁴⁷

I have previously argued that the *VIS*'s clear interest in the foundation of St Samson's Cornish monastery is probably to be taken as evidence that the extant Life is indeed, as its late seventh- or early eighth-century Breton author claimed, a reworking of an earlier, now lost, Life of the saint kept at and probably written for that very community.⁴⁸ It is certainly the task of describing and justifying the circumstances which led to the foundation of that house, rather than those which led to the foundation of the writer's own monastery at Dol, which occupies the bulk of the Life as it now stands: a story of how Samson's miraculous elevation to the episcopacy gained him angelic assistants which 'he alone could see', how one of them instructed him to leave Wales, how he came to Cornwall to fulfil its command, and how the Holy Spirit then required him to build a monastery there before he prepared to cross the Channel.⁴⁹ I suggested that this extended narrative may well reflect the core of the lost Cornish Life used by the monk of Dol, who then appended to it a new story about a succession crisis in northern Brittany which St Samson had resolved.⁵⁰ In the manner of other hagiographic rewriters, he probably revised and recast a substantial amount of his predecessor's work, but the broad outline of the original Life nevertheless remained in the sequence of miracle-stories which still clustered around the account of the Cornish monastery's foundation. On that basis, I cautioned against the old tendency to treat the extant *VIS* as if it were a perfect window onto the opinions of an earlier text, which I would roughly date to the late sixth or early seventh century, when the unknown Cornish monastery was still in its infancy. Given the uncritical use to which the *VIS* has sometimes been put, this is a caution that probably bears repeating. But in light of what we have now seen about the Life's careful handling of Samson's father, Amon, it would seem that the issue of the Cornish monastery hung over more of the *VIS* than has previously been apparent. If the bulk of the second half of what is now 'Book I' of the *Vita* (chs 42–52) largely anticipates and explains the circumstances in which Samson came to receive divine guidance for his eventual building project, so too is its first half (chs 14–19, 22–40) dominated by Samson's reconciliation with his father, by the ways that Amon and his brother became worthy of abbatial responsibility, and by tales of ecclesiastical nepotism and unrepentant sinners designed to contrast meaningfully with the story of Amon's transformation from sinful layman to pious abbot. These are features which are not easily explained by appealing to the literary craft of a Breton hagiographer writing at the behest of Tigernomalus, bishop of Dol (*ob. ca* 707),⁵¹ but which might

⁴⁷ See n.4 above.

⁴⁸ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 23–30; *VIS*, Prol.2 and I.61 (ed. Flobert, 140–2 and 234).

⁴⁹ *VIS*, I.42–52 (ed. Flobert, 206–22).

⁵⁰ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 14–23.

⁵¹ *VIS*, Prol.1 and II.1–2 (ed. Flobert, 138 and 236–8). For the date of Tigernomalus's death: *Annales Lareshamenses*, 707 (ed. Katz, 28); *Annales Mosellani*, 707 (ed. Lappenberg, 494).

more plausibly be ascribed to the earlier Life kept by the community founded by Samson and governed thereafter by his father, Amon.

And we can certainly understand why a monastic community of no great antiquity might wish to possess a *Vita* which explained its founder's immediate departure for the Continent, which justified its first abbot's late entry into the religious life, and which exonerated both father and son from the charge of nepotism in their distribution and attainment of ecclesiastical office. One wonders if this newly emerged community had received criticism, or expected to do so, from more established neighbours and sought to preserve its reputation by means of hagiography. This is a question which the extant *VIS* allows us only to pose but not to answer, for we lack any independent evidence which might reveal how the unnamed monastery was regarded by others in the years around 600, when the original Cornish Life of the saint was written. There is, however, one further story in the Life which appears to show the hagiographer putting a specific gloss on the ecclesiastical career of Samson's family, a story which might support the suggestion that the Cornish Life was originally composed specifically to defend the reputation of the family and its monastic possessions against would-be detractors. There was one member of Samson's family who did not receive praise even from Samson's own hagiographers, and who was instead vilified for her disobedience and sexual immorality: the youngest child of Amon and Anna, Samson's sister.

A family's reputation

The *VIS* reports that Samson's final undertaking in Wales was to visit his mother. He had last seen her when he had received his father's confession, for while Amon and Umbraphel followed him back to the monastery at Llantwit Major, Anna had stayed behind to pursue a different course of action. From the start, she had declared her intention to use the family's riches to establish her own churches and monasteries, in which she, her sister Afrella, and their respective children could pursue their own religious life.⁵² On the eve of his departure for Cornwall, Samson found that work to have been completed, 'and he went to see his mother and aunt, and consecrated the churches which they had already built, ... and rejoiced with them to see his brothers and cousins leading a noble and catholic life'. Not all the news gave cause for celebration, however, and he also 'excommunicated his sister when he found that she had now been taken from her mother and, moreover, been defiled by an adulterous union'.⁵³

We are told nothing more of Samson's sister after her departure, not even her name. She has hardly diverted the attention of modern readers either, although Jean-Christophe Cassard suggested that the accusations made against her represent 'a touch of misogyny which is unique in Breton literature of the time'.⁵⁴ Yet, brief as the account is, we should ask why it is there at all. Her sin and excommunication

⁵² *VIS*, I.29–31 (ed. Flobert, 190–2).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I.45 (ed. Flobert, 212): 'Atque in uia matrem materteramque suam uisitans, earumque ecclesias iam aedificatas consecrans, ac sororem suam iam a sua matre discessam adulterino coitu immo constupratam repperiens atque excommunicans et ipsa in hoc malo tenus suo fine perdurans; ac de suis fratribus et consobrinis, nobilem et catholicam uitam cum suis matribus ducentibus, gratanter congaudens.'

⁵⁴ Cassard, 'La femme bretonne', 147: 'Dans ces quelques lignes discrètes apparues sous la plume de l'hagiographe dolois, on perçoit comme une touche de misogynie, qui est exceptionnelle dans la littérature breton de ce temps.'

are barely developed enough for her story to function adequately as a warning for the reader about the dangers of improper sexual conduct, as Cassard supposed; but equally, her fate is so tangential to Samson's own that the hagiographer was hardly compelled to include it either.

An explanation is probably best sought not in the lurid accusation made against the unnamed woman, which may indeed reflect nothing more than casual monastic misogyny, but, rather, in the fact that she could easily have represented a small failure in the achievements of this emerging network of family monasteries. Although the Life does not say much about the monastic community established by Samson's mother, it did describe Anna's intention to found her own rather than to join some existing house, and implied that her children would follow her into it.⁵⁵ Family foundations of this kind were not unknown at this time,⁵⁶ but one could hardly claim Anna's attempt as an unmitigated success if certain members of the family soon broke from the rest and rejoined secular society. The Life's response was to resort to special pleading, by claiming that St Samson had from the start indicated that his sister would prove unsuited to the monastic life:

His five brothers arrived, along with his sister, who made the sixth and was still at that time very young indeed. And after a brief silence, he said: 'My brothers at least are good and have been given up to God, but that little girl whom you see and have with you has been given to earthly desires. Look after her, all the same, for she is a human being.' When the people who were present heard this, they marvelled greatly and did not dare to ask him anything about this astounding verdict.⁵⁷

Samson's declaration here provides a quietly efficient way to shift the reader's expectations concerning his mother's intended programme of monastic foundation. It ensures that the news of his sister's return to the world, when it finally arrives, will be received primarily as a proof of Samson's prophetic gifts, rather than a sign of Anna's failure to hold her family to the religious life. In a certain respect, Samson's instruction that his mother and brothers should still raise and support his sister even cast them in a charitable light, and the Life could persevere with its boast that one of the most prominent families in sixth-century Wales had 'on one and the same day, been won for Christ'.⁵⁸ The unnamed girl had been struck from the family register before her relatives had even begun their new monastic vocation. Her eventual departure could not therefore reflect badly on their enterprise.

A sense of inconvenient details being carefully negotiated attends this account of Anna and her children, as it did in the case of Amon and his swift rise to the abbacy. Hagiographers were of course adept at putting a tactful or euphemistic gloss on aspects of a saint's conduct which might appear questionable to others. But in these cases, the details did not really relate to Samson's personal conduct at all. The defence mounted by the Life is, rather, a defence of the small network of family monasteries

⁵⁵ *VIS*, I.29–31 (ed. Flobert, 190–2).

⁵⁶ Wood, *The Proprietary Church*, 140–75.

⁵⁷ *VIS*, I.29 (ed. Flobert, 190): 'Presentatis itaque suis quinque fratribus sancto Samsoni una cum sua sorore sexta, admodum adhuc paruula, ita paululum silens responsum reddidit: "Fratres quidem mei boni sunt ac Deo donati, sed ista pusilla quam uos uidetis et habetis ad mundanas uoluntates data est; tamen nutrite eam quia homo est." Quo audito homines qui illic aderant ualde mirati sunt et nihil de hoc miraculo interrogare ausi sunt.'

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I.30 (ed. Flobert, 190): 'frater eiusdem Amonis hoc uidens, una cum sua uxore ac tribus suis filiis, tali sorte ac tali uictoria, sub uno eodemque die, Christo et ipsi lucrati sunt'.

which Samson left in the hands of his kin when he himself set sail for Brittany. By the time that the extant *VIS* was written at Dol, however, both Anna and Amon were dead, and it is hard to think that the manner in which they had obtained and exercised their monastic duties would still have been a live issue for the Breton hagiographer's contemporaries.⁵⁹ It is much less difficult to imagine that these concerns would have mattered to an early hagiographer associated with one of the houses within that monastic network, working while Samson's parents still lived.

This is the impression we get from the narrative alone – but it is interesting to note that it accords with the author of the *VIS*'s own claims about the context in which a Life of St Samson first attained written form, placing its creation 'so shortly after the times of the aforementioned St Samson' that it could draw upon things which 'his mother had relayed ... to the very holy deacon' responsible for its composition.⁶⁰ Since several portions of the extant *VIS* do reveal a particularly defensive attitude towards the circumstances in which Samson's parents came to attain their ecclesiastical positions, it does not seem unwarranted to say that many of the concerns with family and inheritance which we see in the extant *Vita prima* are in some way indebted to the preoccupations of that earlier, lost Life. Presumably they remained visible because the original Life had used miracle-stories to dramatize its account of Amon's confession, and prophecies to rationalize the departure of Samson's sister from her mother's convent. In the years around 700, hagiographers elsewhere in Europe worried that their readers might find a saint's Life without miracles 'contemptuous'.⁶¹ The hagiographer from Dol was in no position to overlook the things which he read concerning the supernaturally charged conversion of Samson's father and the 'amazing verdict' pronounced when Anna proposed to take her children into the monastic life. He found a place for them in his *Vita Samsonis* too, perhaps polishing and repackaging them but evidently retaining enough of their original shape to permit us to glimpse his predecessor carefully defending the reputation of this particular ecclesiastical family.

Conclusion

It may seem that this article has taken the long way around its central problem. When the author of the *VIS* asserted his dependency on an earlier Life of St Samson kept in the saint's foundation in Cornwall, he identified its author as a man named Henoc, said to be 'a very holy deacon who was himself the cousin of St Samson'.⁶² At first sight, that statement might reasonably seem like explanation enough for the prominent role played by Henoc's relatives in the Life of his cousin, Samson. But, as I hope this paper has shown, there is a good deal more than familial recollection underlying the stories told about that extended kin-group. Whether or not those

⁵⁹ Posthumous commemoration of Samson's parents is mentioned in *ibid.*, I.1 (ed. Flobert, 148).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Prol.2 (ed. Flobert, 140–2): 'quod [audiui] a quodam religioso ac uenerabili sene, in cuius domo, quam ultra mare ipse solus Samson fundauerat, ille, per octogenarios fere annos, catholicam religiosamque uitam ducens, propissimeque temporibus eiusdem supradicti sancti Samsonis, matrem eius tradidisse auunculo suo, sanctissimo diacono, qui et ipse diaconus consobrinus esset sancto Samsoni, mihi ueraciter adfirmabat multaue de eius admirabilibus gestis ad me misericorditer referens'.

⁶¹ *Liber beatae Gregorii papae*, ch.3 (ed. Colgrave, 76): 'De quo librum scribere cupientes cum pauca eius de gestis audiuius signorum, nec fastidium sit legentibus precamur.'

⁶² *VIS*, Prol.2 (ed. Flobert, 140–2).

stories were first gathered together by a member of the family is almost immaterial (and in any case, incapable of proof). It is of greater importance to note the purpose to which those stories were put. Their central aim was to deal with the circumstances in which a single aristocratic family had, at some point during the mid-sixth century, carved out a small niche for itself in the ecclesiastical landscape of Wales, Cornwall, and – possibly – Ireland. The means by which that had been possible may well have looked somewhat discreditable to contemporaries, for it might easily have looked as if the prominent Bishop Samson had given systematic preferment to his relatives first by raising them to ecclesiastical office, then by setting them up as abbots in his stead. A series of well-crafted and carefully justified stories sought to defend both Samson and his relatives against any suspicion of nepotism. They described the reluctance with which Samson had resumed contact with his family after his early years as an ascetic; stressed the entire family's embrace of renunciatory ideals (in contrast to other ecclesiastical families who still privileged blood-ties over spiritual attainment, and so brought God's wrath upon themselves); and vilified the one family member who gave up her religious vocation, in order that her departure would not reflect poorly on the reputation of the others.

The degree to which any of these stories about the family's entry into the religious life are actually true cannot be ascertained. But perhaps the fact that they came to form such a key part of Samson's hagiographic record reveals something about the situation in which his early cult first became necessary. I have argued that these linked stories should best be explained as a feature of the original *Life of St Samson*, written at or for the Cornish monastery which Samson left in the hands of his father, Amon. If so, then, rather than thinking of them as a secondary feature, little more than a subplot to the *Life* proper, we might consider whether the family's apparent need to justify its position and defend its reputation provided a major reason for commemorating its most elevated son through hagiography. Explaining Samson's spiritual journey allowed the family to explain their own, and the latter was perhaps the more pressing task in the years after the death of their patron. The network of family monasteries which outlived Samson may well have looked on him as the flag-bearer of their whole enterprise, and initiated his cult for precisely that reason. The context in which the early cult arose might therefore look very similar to the picture which Pádraig Ó Riain has outlined for early medieval Ireland, in which ecclesiastical families with a close genealogical connection to an esteemed ancestor could promote his memory as a means of establishing themselves in new territory, travelling with the stories of the ancestral saint whose memory legitimized their own position.⁶³ The situation of the aristocratic Welsh family which had formerly owed its position to the royal court of Dyfed, but which now found itself at the head of a cluster of monasteries which extended out of Wales into Cornwall and beyond, might have provided a similar impulse to champion the first of their number to have gained ecclesiastical recognition.

In this paper, it has seemed safer and more fruitful to talk about the way that Samson's family conducted itself once they had embarked upon their monastic career, rather than about the circumstances in which they had come to enter into their new vocation. Samson's hagiographers looked back to a confession which Amon made in the presence of his son, and held that up as the moment in which his family embarked upon their new path. But their account was hardly reportage, drawing

⁶³ Ó Riain, 'Irish saints' cults', 291–302.

as it did on prophecies, supernatural women, and a good deal of literary crafting. Any hope that Samson's *Vitae* allow us an insight into the rationale for a sixth-century secular family embarking collectively into the monastic life is bound to be a disappointed one. Yet, even if we set the story aside, there is the slightest chance that one other small piece of information might still reflect something more concrete about the beginnings of this family's ecclesiastical career. It has often been noted that the named members of Samson's family all bear uncommon names, drawing for the most part on Old Testament inspiration. This applies not only to the saint himself and his parents, Amon (Ammon) and Anna (Hannah), but also to his cousin Henoc (Enoch) and his uncle Umbraphel (Amraphel). The practice of adopting Old Testament personal names is well attested among the early medieval Britons, although it is seldom possible to know precisely when an individual might have received such a name. The *VIS* stated that Samson had carried his biblical name since infancy – the result, it was said, of a revelation made to his mother before his birth – but many churchmen evidently received theirs later in life, often to mark some important new stage in their ecclesiastical career. Ordination could provide one such occasion, or episcopal consecration, but so too might the taking of monastic vows.⁶⁴ One wonders, therefore, whether the recorded names of Samson's relatives might be received names taken in this manner. Some support for that suspicion might be found in the one name which does not look to Old Testament sources, that of Samson's aunt Afrella. As Joseph Loth long ago proposed, the recorded name probably derives instead from the Roman name Aurelia, but John Davies has recently added that the form Afrella seems also to echo rather deliberately the name of her husband, Amrafel/Umbraphel.⁶⁵ Davies took this as the work of the *VIS* itself, seeing evidence of etymological punning in the names of both husband and wife; but if this really was a feature of the hagiographer's approach we might expect similar literary games being played with the names of his other characters, Samson's foes as well as his friends. Instead, we only find the writer apologizing for 'not being able to discover the name[s]' of some of his many anonymous characters.⁶⁶ So, if the names of Samson's family are not the work of the hagiographer, why should they draw from shared inspiration or echo each other in the way that they do? We might wonder whether they derive from a real event, a collective act of renaming which marked the family's entry into the religious life in much the same way that other early medieval British ecclesiastics received Old Testament names as markers of individual status.

It is a purely speculative thought that if this were the case, then the choice of names might even finally say something about Samson himself. He had been instrumental in establishing his relatives upon the ecclesiastical landscape of sixth-century Britain, and his cult was in turn fostered by the family monasteries which they had come to possess. Their dependency on his patronage seems clear despite – or rather, because of – the fact that the *Life of St Samson* written for one of these monasteries embellished almost every detail about the family's interactions with its saintly son. If the names of Amon, Anna, Umbraphel, and Afrella were indeed ecclesiastical monikers adopted when Samson first began to oversee their entry into the monastic

⁶⁴ These occasions are identified, with wider discussion of the early insular use of Old Testament names, by Sharpe, 'The naming of Bishop Ithamar'.

⁶⁵ Loth, 'La vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson de Dol', 283; Davies, 'Old Testament personal names', 187.

⁶⁶ *VIS*, I.16 (ed. Flobert, 172): 'maxime malus ille presbiter cuius malum factum ego scio, sed nomen scire non potui'.

life, then they might offer a rare glimpse of Samson's own thought and learning, as well as the tiniest hint of the real relationship between the saint and his family.

LA CIRCULATION DE L'INFORMATION DANS LA VIE ANCIENNE
DE S. SAMSON DE DOL ET LA QUESTION DE SA DATATION

Joseph-Claude Poulin

*English summary: The Diffusion of Information in the Early Life
of St Samson of Dol and the Question of its Date*

This study aims to re-examine the difficult and still uncertain date of the First Life of St Samson of Dol (*BHL* 7478–79). Several generations of philologists and historians have tried to specify its date; the solutions so far proposed have been very different, as much in their chronological range (from the beginning of the seventh century to the beginning of the ninth century) as in the diversity of means employed (linguistic, literary, contextual). The issue is significant because the First Life is the first to have influenced much of the Breton hagiography of the second half of the ninth century. Further, the date of this work conditions the use to which it can be put as witnessing the history of regions of British population on both sides of the Channel in the early middle ages.

The present essay extends a series of attempts through which I have sought to resolve the chronological uncertainty of this key document. After exploiting formal and typological parallels with the *Vita S. Martini* of Sulpicius Severus (in 1977), then using a table of chapters as a tool for distinguishing two layers of the text (in 2001), I now embark on analysing the *Vita* as a system of information. The starting hypothesis draws on the presence of traces of reworking which raise the possibility that we might be dealing with the rewriting of an earlier text (the so-called **Vita primigenia*).

Three approaches are employed in turn in order to specify the relationship between means of writing and dating of the text. Firstly, numerous individuals mentioned in the text are re-situated on a virtual chronological time-line as sources of information: the saint himself, his mother Anna, his cousin Henoc, the latter's nephew and finally a writer of Dol. This chain of mediators can hardly stretch beyond the end of the seventh century, even supposing great longevity for each of them. But it has to be acknowledged that such a chronological chain, on its own, is not very solid.

A second approach is to reconstitute the stages of a progressive elaboration of the dossier of St Samson. How did the redactor(s) gather and shape the traditions about the saint, oral as much as written? Measured from this perspective, the contributions of the two supposed authors do not have the same documentary value. The initial redactor, a deacon named Henoc, could be just an emblematic figure intended to give a familial and reassuring colour to the sequence of transmission of testimonies. A second redactor, anonymous but linked to the monastery and the episcopal see

of Dol, is more convincing when he speaks (on nine occasions with *ego*); he is much more credible when he describes the circumstances of the implementation of his work at the request of the bishop Tigernomagle and of his visit in search of documentary evidence in Wales and Cornwall. It is not possible to reconstruct completely the content of the primitive version, but it is at least possible to identify important segments which are certainly not part of it. Hence the necessity to offer two dates of redaction, not just one.

A third approach available to dating the text is provided by the presence of certain formal borrowings which have influenced the redactions. Traditionally much has been made of the presence (in what I consider the oldest stratum) of the phrase *emendationibus gestis*, found in Gregory the Great, to justify a seventh-century date; even if this borrowing was proven, it would only be a *terminus post quem*. The suggestion of the last editor Pierre Flobert (in 1997) of recognising a dependence on Bede has not won the support of scholars. By contrast, two proven citations, in parts of the text attributable to an anonymous hagiographer of Dol, establish a link with works which did not circulate much before the eighth century, at least in Breton regions. This concerns borrowings from Julian Pomerius (*De vita contemplativa*) and a homily of a Pseudo-Bede.

Placing the Life of St Samson towards the end of the eighth century could correspond to a period in which Carolingian pressure on Armorican Brittany was beginning to assert itself, in the light of the reorganisation of diocesan and metropolitan structures. But the quality of the language of the text seems to reflect a period before the Carolingian *renovatio* in linguistic matters. The question of the date, content and context of the redaction of the *primigenia* continues to present itself. But from now on, it seems that the so-called early Life of St Samson cannot be read as a unitary text. Each of the two textual strata demands a differentiated practice of reading, interpretation and contextualisation.

Introduction

Tous les chercheurs qui ont travaillé sur la Vie de s. Samson se sont posés la question de savoir quand et comment les renseignements relatifs au saint se sont agrégés pour donner le texte que nous connaissons sous la forme d'une *Vita* dite ancienne ou *Vita I^a s. Samsonis* (désormais *VIS*). Pour l'instant, les dates proposées par les chercheurs s'échelonnent entre la première moitié du VII^e siècle et le début du IX^e¹. Afin de répondre à cette question lancinante, la préface du premier livre a été scrutée avec une intensité particulière ; à juste titre, mais le reste de la *vita* fournit aussi des données pertinentes qui n'ont pas toujours été exploitées autant que nécessaire². C'est

¹ La récapitulation du débat la plus récente, établie avant le colloque de Sydney en juin 2013, est celle d'Olson, « The date of the First Life ». Cet auteur avait déjà abordé la question dans son article « The early hagiography ». Le livre récent de T.M. Charles-Edwards fournit une ample matière à réflexion supplémentaire : *Wales and the Britons* ; le témoignage de la Vie de s. Samson y est invoqué plus fréquemment que ne le laisse entrevoir son index. Une connaissance insuffisante de la bibliographie récente affaiblit le traitement de Cordo Russo, « La versión de la *Vita Samsonis* ». Les renvois à des pages Web ont été vérifiés en février 2017.

² Il y a plus à en tirer que le bilan dressé par Kerlouégan, « Les Vies de saints bretons », 200s. Pour cette entrée en matière, Pierre Flobert parle du rédacteur de la Vie; il vaudrait mieux dire rédacteur de la préface: « Le témoignage du rédacteur » ; réimpr. dans *Grammaire comparée*, 636-42 (sans tenir compte de notre *Répertoire raisonné* de 2009 : Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*).

pourquoi il a paru utile de reprendre l'ensemble de cette question de la circulation de l'information, sur les bases les plus larges possible ; l'analyse qui suit servira à compléter sur certains points, à corriger sur d'autres, le *status quaestionis* du Répertoire paru en 2009³.

Cette recherche fournira en même temps l'occasion de remettre en discussion l'hypothèse que nous avons lancée il y a plus d'une décennie, sur d'autres bases⁴ : et si la Vie ancienne était une réécriture ? Deux indices justifient d'emblée, à notre avis, un examen de l'hypothèse de réécriture. Dans le prologue du premier livre, là où l'écrivain expose la genèse de l'œuvre, est-ce que Hénoc – cousin du saint (cf. Tableau 1) et auteur putatif – aurait parlé de lui-même en disant *sanctus / sanctissimus diaconus* (Prol.2) ? C'est assez improbable – et c'est le seul endroit où Hénoc est nommé ; une telle incongruité serait de toute façon incompatible avec le topos de l'humilité déployé dans cette préface. Qu'un hagiographe du VII^e siècle se qualifie lui-même de *sanctus* n'est pas sans précédent ; mais le *sanctus* que s'octroie Audoenus (s. Ouen), écrivant sur s. Éloi, s'explique par un contexte complètement différent du cas de Samson⁵. Second indice : on n'imagine pas que Hénoc prétende avoir découvert, dans un monastère des Cornouailles, l'existence et le contenu d'une Vie de s. Samson qu'il avait rédigée lui-même sur le continent (Prol.2 et 4).

L'action d'une deuxième plume doit donc être envisagée sérieusement, au moins pour les fins de la discussion, puisque ce n'est manifestement pas Hénoc qui a écrit cette préface. Schématiquement, Hénoc aurait composé une première recension (le livre I), qu'on a pris l'habitude d'appeler la **Vita primigenia*, depuis l'abbé Duine⁶ ; puis un remanieur dolois aurait ajouté une préface au livre I et le livre II – pour donner notre Vie dite ancienne. Mais en fait, la situation est plus complexe et plus ambiguë que cela.

Pour essayer de répondre aux questions posées, nous adopterons une démarche en trois étapes :

- qui sont les principaux agents de transmission de l'information relative à Samson ? Est-il possible de placer ces individus sur une échelle chronologique, au moins relative, de manière à circonscrire un horizon temporel, à délimiter une fourchette chronologique propice à la mise par écrit des traditions relatives à Samson ?
- si nous avons affaire à deux écrivains (un gros « si », assurément), comment chacun d'eux a-t-il agencé les renseignements – oraux et écrits – qui lui sont parvenus ? Est-il possible de reconstituer les étapes d'une élaboration

³ Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 308-54. Il faut prendre garde au fait que la section de cet ouvrage consacrée à s. Samson résume (en les corrigeant parfois) les conclusions établies dans nos publications consacrées à ce saint avant 2009 ; il aurait été déraisonnable de déverser la totalité des analyses partielles dans le *Répertoire* de 2009. Par conséquent, il convient dans certains cas de se reporter encore à nos publications préparatoires des années 1977-2001.

⁴ Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson » s'appuie sur la table des chapitres, mais aussi sur les différences de style et de vocabulaire entre deux auteurs putatifs.

⁵ *Vita s. Eligii*, II.1 (*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* [désormais *BHL*] 2476) : « sancti viri Eligius et Audoinus ». Sur l'interprétation de ce passage, voir Heinzelmann, « Eligius monetarius », 252s. C. Bayer estime que ce passage résulte d'une interpolation étrangère à l'auteur : « Vita Eligii », 473s. et 486. Mais cette addition aurait dû se produire très rapidement après la mort de s. Ouen, entre 684 et 697.

⁶ Duine, *Mémento*, 31. F. Plaine a malencontreusement appliqué le terme *primigenia* à la *Vita II^a s. Samsonis* (désormais *VIIS*) (*BHL* 7481, 7483), qu'il croyait première : « Vita antiqua sancti Samsonis », 77.

progressive du dossier de s. Samson ? Est-il possible de reconnaître et de distinguer les contributions respectives de deux auteurs ?

- après avoir revisité la chronologie du processus de transmission de l'information et après avoir inventorié le plus précisément possible les canaux d'information utilisés par le ou les auteurs de la Vie, quelles conséquences en découlent pour la datation de la Vie ancienne ? Avons-nous affaire à deux auteurs distincts, successifs, ou à un seul hagiographe, qui essaie de faire croire à l'existence d'une *primigenia* composée par un prétendu Hénoc ?

Chemin faisant, il faudra assurément prendre deux précautions importantes :

- se demander si toutes les données présentes dans le texte de la Vie sont également crédibles, compte tenu des codes et contraintes propres au discours hagiographique. Sont-elles conciliables entre elles ?
- faire attention à tenir compte des sources formelles utilisées ou imitées pour la mise en écriture de la *vita*, qu'elle soit une œuvre unitaire ou l'agencement de deux strates textuelles. En effet, la disponibilité de ces sources – leur « *pattern of availability*⁷ » – peut aider à orienter la réflexion sur une chronologie de rédaction.

Les informateurs

Combien de temps s'est écoulé entre la mort du saint et la composition de sa première Vie ? Quels relais intermédiaires se sont relayés pendant cet espace de temps ? Comment l'information a-t-elle circulé entre une cascade d'informateurs, jusqu'à donner la Vie ancienne telle que nous la connaissons ? Qui sont les principaux agents de transmission et comment leur témoignage s'imbrique-t-il les uns à la suite des autres – jusqu'à donner une chronologie au moins relative du déroulement de ce processus ? Entre la mort de Samson et la rédaction de sa Vie, Merdrignac estime qu'il s'est écoulé environ un demi-siècle⁸. Sowerby pense qu'il s'est écoulé environ un siècle⁹. Olson est disposée à aller jusqu'à 120 ans¹⁰. À partir des mêmes données, Flobert compte un siècle et demi¹¹.

En 1994, Charles Thomas a présenté sous forme de tableau l'échelonnement chronologique des informateurs, afin de reconstituer la chaîne de transmission¹² ; nous avons essayé de compléter et pousser plus loin cet exercice (tableau 2).

⁷ Notion proposée par Cross, « The literate Anglo-Saxon », 94s.

⁸ Cette position traditionnelle est encore maintenue dans son dernier livre: Merdrignac, *D'une Bretagne à l'autre*, 128, n.18.

⁹ Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 1.

¹⁰ Olson, « The date of the First Life », 174.

¹¹ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 5; de 120 à 150 ans (ou 140 ans) à la page 109.

¹² Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?*, 226. Malgré son titre et sa longueur, l'étude de Charles de la Lande de Calan n'apporte rien sur la chronologie du clan samsonien : « Essai sur la chronologie des rois et des saints de la Bretagne insulaire du V^e au VII^e siècle ». Et pas davantage Morris, « The dates of the Celtic saints », 379-84.

La Circulation de l'information

Tableau 3.1. Généalogie de la famille de s. Samson de Dol (d'après les données de sa Vie ancienne)

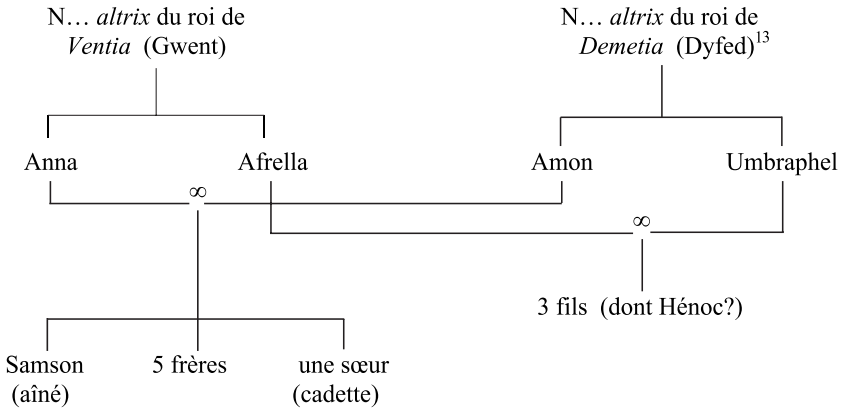


Tableau 3.2. Chronologie des acteurs de la transmission des traditions relatives à s. Samson de Dol (VI^e-VII^e siècles)

500	525	550	575	600	625	650	675	700
Samson			† 565?					
Anna	-----							
Hénoc	-----							
Neveu de Hénoc		-----						
Remanieur dolois				-----				
Eltutus	† avant 500 ¹⁴							
Viniavus ¹⁵		-----	† 579					

¹³ Dans son tableau généalogique, Fawtier, *La Vie de saint Samson*, 35 inverse la traduction des noms latins des royaumes dont sont originaires les parents du saint.

¹⁴ Eltutus aurait été élevé au sacerdoce par s. Germain d'Auxerre (en I.7) dans les années 430 ou 440 ? La difficulté de concilier cette donnée avec la chronologie de la vie de s. Samson avait amené J.E. Lloyd à penser que la mention de s. Germain avait été interpolée : *A History of Wales*, I.144, n.96. P.A. Wilson essaie plutôt de réconcilier ces données en plaçant à Auxerre l'ordination du jeune Eltutus en 444 (indémontrable) et en faisant naître Samson vers 485 (trop tôt, à notre avis) : « Romano-British and Welsh christianity », 117. Doute sur l'existence d'une rencontre entre Eltutus et Germain chez Thornton, « Illtud », 208.

¹⁵ Personnage nommé dans un passage peut-être interpolé (en I.46), en tout cas absent de la table des chapitres. T.M. Charles-Edwards pense qu'il s'agit de s. Finian de Movilla : « Britons in Ireland », 18.

Samson

Quand Samson a-t-il vécu ? La théorie de Rice Rees sur l'existence de deux évêques homonymes n'a pas été retenue¹⁶. Le seul point fixe sur lequel nous pouvons nous appuyer – peut-être – est la présence d'un évêque Samson au concile de Paris en 562¹⁷. Samson a signé les actes de ce concile comme évêque, mais sans siège identifié ; est-ce bien notre Samson ? William McDermott en a douté, mais sa position n'a pas été admise¹⁸. Sur les 15 signataires des actes du concile, deux seulement indiquent leur siège : les archevêques de Bourges et de Rouen, en tête de liste. Il est vrai que plusieurs personnages nommés Samson ont circulé sur le continent pendant le haut Moyen Âge ; on cite habituellement ici un fils de Chilpéric et Frédégonde, nommé Samson, mort encore jeune en 577¹⁹. Mais il y en a quelques autres :

- un archiprêtre Samson (au diocèse de Poitiers ?) a souscrit le *Testamentum s. Radegundis* ; il est donc attesté dans les années 584×587²⁰ ;
- un hérétique Irlandais nommé Samson est mentionné dans la correspondance de s. Boniface²¹ ;
- un autre Samson est mentionné vers 800 dans le colophon d'un manuscrit originaire de Corbie²².

Personnellement, nous acceptons de reconnaître l'évêque de Dol au concile de Paris, même si ses biographes n'en parlent pas²³ ; Samson devait alors être plutôt vers la fin de sa carrière, mais il est inutile de spéculer sur son âge au moment où il

¹⁶ Rees, *An Essay of the Welsh Saints*, 228s. et 254. Aucun personnage nommé Samson – ni aucun membre de sa famille – n'est répertorié par Kakoschke, *Die Personennamen*.

¹⁷ L'étude récente de Halfond, *Archaeology*, n'a pas fait progresser la critique de cette date ; il s'en tient à la fourchette 556-73. La souscription de Samson, en forme d'hexamètre léonin, serait l'indice d'une bonne éducation reçue à l'école d'Eltut, de l'avis de J.R. Davies, « The saints of South Wales », 381s.

¹⁸ McDermott, « Felix of Nantes », 8. *Contra* : Halfond, « Charibert I », 22s.

¹⁹ Grégoire de Tours, *Historiae* 5.22 (éd. Krusch & Levison). Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 19 et 114. Bruno Dumézil pense plutôt à un rapprochement avec le modèle biblique : Bruneau, 177s. Et plus encore Goosmann, « The Long-Haired Kings », 253-4. Sa démonstration séduit Dailey, « Gregory of Tours », 12. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, III.B.1110 ne contient pas d'autre personnage de ce nom, non plus que ses suppléments : Martindale, « Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire: *Addenda* » ; Heinzelmann, « Gallische prosopographie » ; Mathisen, « Some hagiographical *Addenda* » ; Handley, « One hundred and fifty-two addenda ». Samson de Dol est bien présent dans Pietri & Heijmans (édd.), *Prosopographie de la Gaule chrétienne*, II.1700s. ; mais aucun autre personnage nommé Samson n'y figure. Non plus que dans le catalogue de Felder, *Die Personennamen*. Nous n'avons pas vu la thèse de doctorat de Cane, « Personal Names ».

²⁰ Godding, *Prêtres en Gaule*, 513.

²¹ Boniface, *Ep.* 80 (éd. Tangl) ; Gougoud, « L'œuvre des Scotti », 30s.

²² Aujourd'hui à St-Petersbourg : Lowe (éd.), *Codices*, XI.1608 ; Bénédictins du Bouveret (éd.), *Colophons*, I, n.3334. Ganz, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance*, 155. John R. Davies n'a relevé aucune de ces occurrences continentales extérieures à l'Armorique : « Old Testament personal names », 180.

²³ G.I. Halfond essaie d'esquisser un contexte historique possible pour cet épisode de la vie du saint : « Charibert I », 22s. La présence de Samson de Dol deviendrait plus problématique s'il fallait placer ce synode de Paris après 567, comme le fait, après d'autres, Cantelli Berarducci, « Elezioni e consacrazioni episcopali », 27, n.80. Nous suivons plutôt ici la position de Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich*, 123 ou Pontal, *Histoire des conciles mérovingiens*, 153.

est devenu évêque²⁴. Sa présence à Paris témoigne du moins du fait que les Francs le considéraient bien comme un évêque²⁵. Depuis la première édition de la *VIS*, par Mabillon, en 1668, il est d'usage de situer sa mort vers 565 ; pourquoi pas²⁶ ? En tout cas, Samson n'a pas paru au concile suivant, à Tours en 567. Quand est-il né ? Disons vers 500 au plus tard²⁷, s'il est vrai qu'il a succédé à l'abbé Piro († 521)²⁸ à Caldey Island (en I.36). Faire de s. Samson l'évêque anonyme qui a baptisé sous le nom de Samson un fils de Chilpéric à Tournai en 575 paraît une proposition excessive²⁹.

Anna (mère du saint)

La mère de Samson avait quel âge au moment de la naissance du saint ? Elle a d'abord souffert de stérilité au début de son mariage ; sa sœur cadette Afrella avait déjà trois enfants avant la naissance de Samson. Mais Anna ne pouvait pas être trop vieille non plus, car Samson est le premier de ses sept enfants ; une stérilité quasi biblique, sept enfants d'un côté, trois enfants de l'autre, c'est probablement à prendre *cum grano salis*. Le nom même d'Anna constitue peut-être une stylisation inspirée par l'Anna biblique³⁰. Si, par hypothèse, Anna avait environ 20 ans au moment de la naissance de Samson, elle a dû naître peu avant 480, au plus tard. Quand Anna est-elle morte ? La question est d'importance, car le préfacier lui attribue un rôle dans la transmission des traditions relatives à Samson ; en effet, elle a communiqué des données particulières à Hénoc, cousin du saint et biographe virtuel (Prol.2). Anna était encore vivante quand Samson a franchi la Manche pour s'installer sur le continent (I.45) ; mais rien ne dit qu'elle a survécu à son fils aîné³¹. On peut donc difficilement prolonger son existence au-delà du deuxième quart du VI^e siècle – et encore, à condition de la faire vivre très âgée.

²⁴ François Duine s'y est essayé, sans oser conclure de façon trop catégorique : « La Vie de saint Samson », 344-46, n.5. Thomas Taylor propose 521 : *The Life of St. Samson*, xi et xxix.

²⁵ Observation judicieuse de Burkitt, « St. Samson of Dol », 56. À moins de considérer Samson comme un chapelain des Bretons, de statut épiscopal, un peu comme le Mansuetus *episcopus Britannorum* présent au concile de Tours de 461, comme le fait Fahy, « When did the Britons become Bretons? », 115-7.

²⁶ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 114 retient « vers 570 ». La précision ajoutée par un remanieur au milieu du IX^e siècle n'a évidemment aucune valeur : il fait mourir Samson à l'âge de 120 ans (*VIS*, II.26 ; *BHL* 7483).

²⁷ Duine, « La Vie de saint Samson », 344, n.5 fixe la naissance de Samson vers 486, un peu trop tôt à notre avis.

²⁸ Date retenue par Hennig, « Caldey Island », col.1394. Sur la localisation du monastère de Piro à Caldey Island et sa fréquentation par Samson, cf. Wooding, « Island and coastal churches », 205-12.

²⁹ T. Charles-Edwards jongle avec cette hypothèse : *Wales and the Britons*, 66s. M. Gaillard et C. Mériaux ne l'évoquent pas : « La cathédrale et ses évêques », 66.

³⁰ Comme le pensait déjà Duine, « Origines bretonnes », 127. Voir aussi Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 31s., n.46. Dans le même ordre d'idées, il ne semble pas y avoir d'influence typologique dérivée du Samson biblique sur la représentation de s. Samson par ses biographes ; cf. Dinkova-Bruun, « Biblical thematics ».

³¹ *Contra* : Flobert, « Le témoignage du rédacteur », 164s. (réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 639) pense que Samson était déjà mort quand sa mère a parlé à Hénoc. Le texte de la Vie de Samson n'impose pas d'aller aussi loin, à notre avis.

Hénoc (cousin du saint)

Laissons de côté la question de savoir si le nom de Hénoc dérive de l'anthroponymie biblique (le prophète Énoch) ou s'il est un simple équivalent de *senex*, en langue bretonne (bret. *hen*), ou s'il désigne un abbé³² ; supposons pour l'instant que Hénoc est un vrai personnage historique. Hénoc est-il un des trois fils d'Afrella, sœur cadette d'Anna ? Dans l'affirmative, Hénoc serait alors légèrement plus âgé que son cousin Samson ; il serait donc né à la toute fin du V^e siècle, au plus tard. C'est à ce Hénoc que la préface du livre I attribue la mise par écrit d'un premier récit des gestes de Samson ; il aurait composé ce texte sur le continent, où il avait accompagné son cousin (Prol.2). Puis Hénoc est reparti Outre-Manche, avec son récit ; c'est là que le rédacteur de la première préface en a pris connaissance plus tard.

Au cours de sa vie, Samson apparaît à plusieurs reprises accompagné par un diacre anonyme (« suus diaconus » en I.29, par exemple) ; ce diacre n'est pas son cousin Hénoc³³. En effet, ce dernier devient diacre tardivement dans la *Vita*, au chapitre 52 du premier livre seulement. La mention de cette accession au diaconat (absente de la table des chapitres) y est liée à la présentation de Hénoc dans la préface du livre I (« in principio nostri operis iam dicto ») ; ce passage du chapitre 52 constitue donc une addition à la *primigenia* par le rédacteur de cette préface. Ce n'est pas Hénoc qui parle lui-même de sa propre ordination ; le remanieur dolois est seul à fournir le nom de Hénoc.

Hénoc a recueilli de la bouche de sa tante Anna des traditions sur la vie de Samson (Prol.2 et I.31) ; cela ne pose pas de problème chronologique, car la transmission a pu s'effectuer au cours de la première moitié du VI^e siècle, avant la traversée de Samson et de Hénoc sur le continent. Hénoc a survécu à son oncle Umbraphel et à sa tante Anna, car il a entendu lire régulièrement leur nom au *Memento* des morts (I.1). Il a aussi survécu à Samson, puisqu'il évoque la fin de sa vie : « usque ad felicem suum finem » (I.44) ; pourtant, la mention du décès de Samson n'apparaît que de façon très rapide, minimaliste, à la fin du dernier chapitre du livre I. Est-ce une addition postérieure ? Si Hénoc est rentré dans sa patrie du vivant de Samson, on comprend qu'il n'ait rien écrit sur la mort de son cousin. Notons en tout cas que la mort de Samson n'apparaît pas dans la table des chapitres ; cette table ne concerne que le premier livre. Pour Hénoc, le culte de s. Samson était déjà bien établi (« iuxta sancti Samsonis altare ad missam cantandam legere quam multis vicibus audiui », en I.1) ; cette précocité est un peu inquiétante. En tout cas, Hénoc n'a guère pu vivre au-delà de 575 environ – à condition de le faire vivre très âgé ; ce qui place la rédaction de la *primigenia* vers 570 au plus tard³⁴.

³² Cf. la discussion de ce point par Merdrignac, « Henoc, les *philosophi* et Pental », 170-73. Il ne faut sans doute pas trop s'empresse d'y voir un calque du breton, à la lumière du bilan dressé par Harvey, « The non-Classical vocabulary », 94s. ; pp.8s. de la version numérique. Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, traduit *senex* tantôt par « vieillard », tantôt (le plus souvent) par « Supérieur ».

³³ Ce point est discuté plus précisément par Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson de Dol comme réécriture », 285-87.

³⁴ Flobert va trop loin à notre avis en choisissant « pas beaucoup avant 580 » comme date de rédaction : « Le témoignage du rédacteur », 165 (réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 640). Pour Burkitt, Hénoc serait mort vers 570 : « St. Samson of Dol », 49. Vers 860, un hagiographe de Léhon franchit un pas supplémentaire en faisant de s. Magloire un cousin de Samson (donc frère de Hénoc ?) : *Vita s. Maglorii*, 1 (BHL 5140). Une construction généalogique pour le moins hasardeuse.

Neveu de Hénoc

La présence d'un membre du clan samsonien dans le monastère fondé par Samson dans les Cornouailles³⁵ est cohérente avec le contexte dépeint par la Vie : en effet, nous y voyons fonctionner un système monastique au caractère familial bien affirmé. C'est vrai pour Eltutus : ses neveux anticipent d'hériter la charge abbatiale de leur oncle (I.14). C'est encore plus vrai pour Samson : tout son clan vire à la vie monastique ou à la viduité consacrée : père et mère, oncle et tante, frères et cousins (mais pas sa sœur) en I.29/30.

Ce moine cornouaillais a connu son oncle Hénoc (Prol.2) ; il possédait le texte de la *primigenia*. Donc il est né au plus tard avant le milieu du VI^e siècle. Comme il a vécu une vie monastique pendant presque 80 ans (nous dit-on), il a pu vivre – théoriquement – jusqu'au deuxième quart du VII^e siècle. C'est ce « venerabilis senex » qui a transmis le texte de la *primigenia* à l'auteur de la préface du premier livre³⁶ ; la scène du vieillard qui lit un texte devant un écrivain rappelle celle que dépeint Sulpice Sévère dans *Gallus* I.23.7 : « hunc [librum] ego in eremo a quodam sene legi vidi ». Le risque est bien réel d'avoir affaire ici au topos de l'informateur octogénaire³⁷.

Remanieur dolois

Voici le dernier acteur dans la genèse de la Vie ancienne de s. Samson : il est un Dolois (« in Dolo monasterio ... apud nos habemus », en I.61). Il a rencontré le neveu de Hénoc dans un monastère fondé par Samson, dans les Cornouailles³⁸. Ce neveu lui a transmis des traditions orales et écrites ; nous ignorons la date de cette rencontre, mais elle ne peut pas être postérieure au deuxième quart du VII^e siècle. Le remanieur a ensuite mis au point et complété la Vie ancienne, alors qu'il était lui-même âgé³⁹. Quand ? Cette compilation finale de toutes les données relatives à Samson fut faite au dernier quart du VII^e siècle, au plus tard ; avant 700 donc.

³⁵ Sur le caractère unique de cette fondation, cf. Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 10s. Sa localisation exacte demeure toutefois incertaine; cf. Orme, *A History of the County of Cornwall*, 135. Il est en tout cas exclus d'y voir Llantwit, comme le fait Burkitt, « St. Samson of Dol », 48s., car la construction de cet établissement est attribuée à s. Germain d'Auxerre en I.42. Wade-Evans croyait pouvoir retenir une localisation à Southill : *Welsh Christian Origins*, 206s.

³⁶ Le texte ne dit pas que ce neveu a parlé à Hénoc, comme l'a bien vu Olson, « The early hagiography », 126 (à la suite de Burkitt, « St. Samson of Dol », 49), mais la relation de parenté est clairement énoncée. Un relais d'un oncle à son neveu se rencontre aussi dans la *Vita s. Columbae* d'Adamnán, mais sans contact formel apparent avec la Vie de s. Samson, ni sur ce point ni ailleurs, malgré Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 81, n.96.

³⁷ Comme chez Grégoire de Tours, *Liber vitae Patrum* 13.3 à propos de s. Lupicin (*BHL* 5075); Prinz, « Hagiographie als Kultpropaganda », 190s.

³⁸ Cette rencontre n'a pas pu survenir au monastère fondé par Samson à Dol, comme le pense Joseph Loth, car le rédacteur de la préface en parle comme *istud monasterium* (Prol.2) – ce n'est pas son monastère : Loth, « La Vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson, abbé-évêque de Dol », 305, 309 et 327; 5, 9 et 27 de la réimpression.

³⁹ « Prope quasi ad seculi terminum nostri » (« quoique presque parvenu au terme de notre existence ») en II.1.

Que penser de cette cascade de témoins qui interviennent dans le dossier de Samson ? L'enchaînement repose sur une succession de personnages tous très âgés ; ce n'est pas absolument impossible, mais cela ressemble beaucoup à une convention. La transmission de traditions par un intermédiaire très âgé, on en trouve un cas chez s. Jérôme (*De viris illustribus* 53). Il y a donc un risque bien réel d'avoir ici des figures de style destinées à rassurer le lecteur, mais pas à fonder une chronologie absolue. D'autant que le rédacteur ne se soucie pas de maîtriser par ailleurs une chronologie bien exacte. Deux personnages secondaires posent en effet des problèmes chronologiques supplémentaires :

- Eltutus (Illtud) : il est à la tête d'un monastère qui aurait été fondé par s. Germain d'Auxerre († 448) (en I.42) ; Germain aurait élevé Eltutus au sacerdoce, en 429×30⁴⁰ (en I.7). Dans ces conditions, Eltutus pourrait difficilement avoir scolarisé Samson au début du VI^e siècle (en I.9 à 11)⁴¹.
- Viniavus : si ce Viniavus est bien le Finnian de Movilla cher à Pádraig O'Riain⁴², il est exact qu'il fut célèbre dès son vivant (il est dit « sapientissimus » en I.46). Comme ce Finnian serait mort, âgé, vers 579⁴³, il est théoriquement possible que Samson l'ait rencontré avant de passer sur le continent.

Mais il est difficile d'accepter que Samson ait rencontré *à la fois* Eltutus et Viniavus. Quant à Dubricius (Dyfrig, en gallois), il est difficile de lui attribuer des dates précises autrement que par ses rapports avec s. Samson pendant la première moitié du VI^e siècle ; sa première apparition documentée est justement dans la Vie de s. Samson⁴⁴.

Cette récapitulation chronologique est-elle fonctionnelle ? Est-elle crédible ? Bien sûr, en hagiographie médiévale, la précision chronologique n'est pas une qualité première, ni nécessaire. Si on la prend au sérieux pour le dossier de Samson, il en ressort tout de même une chose : nous avons *deux* auteurs : Hénoc au VI^e siècle et un remanieur vers la fin du VII^e siècle. Mais si nous postulons que « cousin » (à la mode bretonne) ne veut pas vraiment dire « cousin » au sens actuel du terme, et que « neveu » ne signifie pas « neveu » comme nous l'entendons aujourd'hui, alors toute cette chronologie devient flottante, insaisissable, extensible de toutes les

⁴⁰ Il faut s'arrêter à cette date haute, s'il est vrai que le second voyage de Germain en *Britannia* (vers 445 ?) est une fiction, comme le pense Barrett, « Saint Germanus ». Nicholas J. Higham est disposé à accepter l'historicité du second voyage, mais sans aller jusqu'à lui attribuer une date : « Constantius, St Germanus », 130-36. Même incertitude sur cette date chez Pietri & Heijmans, « Germanus 1 », 881.

⁴¹ P. Flobert trouve lui aussi cet enchaînement chronologique un peu trop étiré : « La Vie ancienne de saint Samson et l'histoire », 187, n.13 (réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 632s., n.13).

⁴² À plusieurs reprises depuis les années 1970, et dernièrement dans son livre *The Making of a Saint*, 6-8, réfutant les thèses de Léon Fleuriot, qui faisait de Viniavus un Breton. Koch, « Uinniau », passe en revue les diverses hypothèses d'identification de ce personnage. Mais la discussion sur l'identité de ce Viniavus n'est pas close ; voir par exemple Clancy, « The real St Ninian », 12-20 et 25-27, et ses références.

⁴³ O'Riain, *The Making of a Saint*, 17. B. Merdrignac reconnaît plutôt Finnian de Clonard, qui serait mort en 549 : « La Vita Oudocei », 204. Nous ne suivons pas J.-Y. Le Moing, quand il estime que Samson aurait pu convaincre Viniavus de passer lui aussi sur le continent : « Saint Winniau », 245s. ; et encore Le Moing, « Saint-Uniac », 39.

⁴⁴ J.R. Davies, « The saints of South Wales », 370. D.E. Thornton le situe approximativement dans la période de 475×525 environ : 'Dyfrig', 494. La *Vita s. Dubricii* (BHL 2339) n'est qu'une compilation du XII^e siècle.

manières ...⁴⁵ En somme, cet exercice de critique chronologique ne donne pas des bases bien solides pour arriver à dater le texte (ou ses composantes). Est-ce que l'étude du contenu peut procurer de meilleurs points d'appui ?

L'accumulation progressive des données sur s. Samson (cf. Annexe)

La prétention d'un hagiographe médiéval à utiliser une source écrite primitive découverte par hasard fait partie des accessoires conventionnels du discours hagiographique⁴⁶. Mais supposons – pour les fins de la discussion – que la *primigenia* a existé ; quel était son contenu ? D'où viennent les renseignements sur Samson ? Hénoc était en position de raconter aussi bien :

- la phase *insulaire* de la vie du saint, qu'il connaissait comme membre de la famille – c'est d'ailleurs cette tranche de vie qui occupe la plus grande place dans la Vie ancienne ;
- que la phase *continentale*, puisqu'il a accompagné son cousin dans sa migration ; il était en mesure de raconter son activité tant en *Britannia* (c'est-à-dire l'Armorique) qu'en *Romania* (c'est-à-dire les pays francs)⁴⁷.

De quelles sources Hénoc disposait-il pour documenter son récit ?

Sources orales

Samson lui-même

- I.17 : « Samsonem conlocutionem habuisse audivimus » (« nous avons su que Samson avait eu une conversation ») ;
- I.32 (et encore en I.58) : Hénoc sait que Samson a l'habitude de chanter le Psaume 135 ;

⁴⁵ Sur les différents degrés de cousinage en droit gallois du haut Moyen Âge, cf. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 304. Scepticisme sur la chronologie à tirer de la préface du livre I chez Wood, « Forgery in Merovingian hagiography », 382 ; il retient néanmoins la fin du VII^e siècle comme date de rédaction d'une œuvre unitaire. Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 109, concède que Hénoc n'est sans doute pas un cousin direct de Samson ; c'était déjà la position de Burkitt, « St. Samson of Dol », 49 et 55.

⁴⁶ Festugière, « Lieux communs littéraires », 125 et 132s. ; 273 et 280s. de la réimpression.

⁴⁷ Notons en passant la différence de tonalité entre ces deux étapes du parcours du saint. Avant de traverser la Manche, la vie de Samson est marquée par une recherche de retraite ascétique de plus en plus exigeante ; c'est un des fondements de sa réputation chez ses compatriotes. Les quatre moments clés de ce parcours de surenchérissement sur la vie monastique sont : le départ du monastère d'Eltut pour celui – plus exigeant – de Piro (I.20/21) ; l'abandon de son abbatiat – jugé trop exigeant – au monastère de Caldey Island pour suivre des savants irlandais dans leur île (I.36/37) ; au retour dans son pays natal, la création d'un ermitage au bord de la Severn est préférée à la vie en monastère (I.40/41) ; enfin l'installation d'un ermitage dans une grotte plutôt que dans un monastère en Cornouailles (I.50). Arrivé sur le continent, sa quête de solitude s'efface, sans être remplacée par une vie cénobitique (bien qu'il fonde les monastères de Dol et de Pental – et de nombreux autres, dit-on en I.52), non plus que par une activité pastorale ou missionnaire (sauf une intervention à Guernesey en II.13). Il n'éprouve aucune difficulté langagière comparable à celles qu'a rencontrées s. Boniface deux siècles plus tard : Banniard, « Credo et langage ». En I.46, l'écrivain révèle sa connaissance de la langue bretonne en traduisant correctement en latin le nom breton de Viniavus (= *Lux*).

- I.43 : « ut ipse [Samson] post referebat » (« comme lui-même le rapportait ensuite »). C'est plausible, étant donné que Hénoc est membre de la famille et compagnon d'exil. Mais une difficulté surgit en I.45 ;
- I.45 : Hénoc a entendu dire que Samson aurait raconté à son père la vision qui lui enjoignait de partir en pèlerinage outre-mer. Cet énoncé pose deux problèmes : l'édition Flobert a retenu « ut narrasse postea suo patri audivimus » (« comme nous avons entendu dire qu'il le raconta ensuite à son père ») ; mais les deux manuscrits les plus anciens portent *pari* au lieu de *patri*, ce qui n'offre pas un sens très clair. En outre, tout le passage des chapitres 45 à 47 couvre une tranche de vie (départ du Pays de Galles pour les Cornouailles) qui n'est pas annoncée par la table des chapitres ; s'agit-il d'une interpolation ? *Audivimus* pourrait correspondre à un simple ouï-dire de la part de Hénoc. Mais un remanieur dolois n'aurait évidemment pas pu entendre une conversation entre le saint et son père⁴⁸.

Tout cela est plausible, mais invérifiable.

Anna, mère du saint

- Prol.2 : « matrem eius tradidisse avunculo suo » (« sa mère avait rapporté à son oncle »), c'est-à-dire à Hénoc : puisque c'est le remanieur qui tient la plume dans ce prologue, comment a-t-il pu connaître l'existence d'une conversation entre la mère du saint et son neveu Hénoc ? Par l'intermédiaire d'une portion maintenant perdue de la *primigenia* ? Par une tradition familiale rapportée par le neveu de Hénoc ? C'est un témoignage fragile, sinon douteux.
- I.31 : « mater eius singillatim se vocans fertur ac dixisse ei » (« sa mère, dit-on, l'appela en particulier et lui dit ») : Hénoc prête à Anna un discours direct adressé à son saint fils. Hénoc a pu en avoir connaissance, mais il est impossible de s'en assurer.

Dubric, évêque gallois

- I.43 : « sanctum papam Dubricium, ut ipse postea referebat » (« le saint prélat Dubric, comme lui-même le rapportait ensuite ») : cet évêque gallois a raconté comment un songe l'avait convaincu de consacrer Samson évêque. Ce récit a pu parvenir à Hénoc ; mais c'est encore une fois invérifiable.

Traditions monastiques galloises

- I.17 : Hénoc a entendu (« audivimus ») une conversation de Samson avec le *pistor* (« boulanger ») du monastère d'Eltutus (Llanilltud Fawr ; angl. Llantwit Major) ;

⁴⁸ Fawtier (éd.), *La Vie de saint Samson*, 75 écarte à juste titre la possibilité que le « venerabilis senex » (« vieillard vénérable ») cornouaillais ait pu recueillir les paroles d'Amon, père de Samson.

- I.36 : noyade de l'abbé Piro à Caldey Island (en état d'ébriété) : « ut aiunt » (« dit-on ») ;
- I.37 : « ut aiunt », à propos de prodiges effectués par Samson en Irlande.

Sources écrites

- I.1 : « emendationibus gestis » : sous la plume de Hénoc, que sont ces « actes plus élégants »⁴⁹ ? Un document antérieur à la *primigenia* ? Hénoc serait alors lui-même un remanieur. Ou la *primigenia* elle-même⁵⁰ ? Cette expression est-elle empruntée à Grégoire le Grand⁵¹ ? Peu importe ici, puisque de toute façon, nous ignorons l'auteur, la date et le contenu de ce document hypothétique. Cette impasse peut faire craindre l'utilisation d'une simple tactique oratoire ; bref, une source fantomatique, destinée à rassurer le lecteur. Cette expression aurait-elle été introduite postérieurement ? Le syntagme *indubitanter conperimus* (« nous avons trouvé sans équivoque ») qui l'accompagne ressemble assez à la manière d'écrire du remanieur qui a ajouté le prologue et le deuxième livre ; cinq autres occurrences équivalentes sont en effet sorties de sa plume, et là seulement⁵².
- I.1 : un *Memento* des morts, lu régulièrement à la messe et contenant les noms des parents de Samson : « parentum nomina singula ... ad missam cantandam legere quammultis vicibus audiui » (« j'ai maintes fois entendu lire ... à la messe chantée le nom de ses deux parents »)⁵³. Hénoc n'avait pas vraiment besoin d'une source écrite pour garantir l'exactitude des noms de son oncle Amon et de sa tante Anna. C'est sympathique, sans plus.
- I.42 : « indiculum dirigunt » (« ils envoient une lettre ») : un message écrit est envoyé à Samson par des évêques réunis en synode, pour l'inviter à se joindre à eux – ils vont le consacrer abbé. L'existence de cette source écrite est douteuse ; mais même si elle a existé, il n'est pas certain que Hénoc l'ait utilisée, car nous pensons que cette phrase (sinon l'alinéa entier) fut ajoutée par le remanieur – à voir plus loin.

C'est l'ensemble de ces sources, orales et écrites, qui est amalgamé par Hénoc pour donner la *primigenia*. À quel public s'adressait-il ? En l'absence d'une préface propre, nous sommes réduit à constater que l'insistance sur la partie insulaire de la vie de Samson (jusqu'au chapitre 51, sur un total de 61) en fait une rédaction destinée à un public insulaire. C'est pourquoi Hénoc l'a ramenée avec lui sur l'île ; mais nous ne

⁴⁹ Cette expression est également présente dans la *Vita s. Remigii*, 2 d'Hincmar de Reims (*BHL* 7155).

⁵⁰ C'est la position d'Olson, « The early hagiography », 127 ; et plus récemment Olson, « The date of the First Life », 178. Mais ce syntagme apparaît dans une portion du texte réputée appartenir à la *primigenia*.

⁵¹ Ce pape l'applique aux Actes de s. Félicité (*Homélies sur les Évangiles*, 3) et non pas s. Thècle, comme chez Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 93. Sur la difficulté d'interpréter cette expression chez Grégoire le Grand, cf. Rosenwein, « *In gestis emendationibus* ». Voir aussi la discussion de son interprétation par Philippart, « Grégoire le Grand », 264s.

⁵² *Indubitanter ... repperi* (Prol.4) / *indubitanter credimus* (II.3) / *indubitanter credimus* (II.9ex) / *indubitanter sciamus* (II.10ex) / *indubitanter cognovimus* (II.14).

⁵³ Sur la lecture des noms de défunts à la messe, cf. Bernard, *Transitions liturgiques*, 226-48.

voyons pas la *primigenia* circuler comme telle dans l'île ; d'ailleurs, nous ne la voyons pas davantage circuler comme telle sur le continent non plus. Si la Vie primitive fut composée à Llanilltud Fawr, comme Karen Jankulak en fait l'hypothèse⁵⁴, il faudrait accepter que le texte s'y était ensuite perdu, car ce n'est pas là que le remanieur l'a retrouvée – bien qu'il y soit apparemment passé personnellement.⁵⁵

Alors : est-ce que la *primigenia* a vraiment existé ? Hénoc est-il nécessaire ? Si elle a existé, cette version primitive a de toute façon été ensuite retouchée par un remanieur. Comment cette reprise en sous-œuvre a-t-elle pu s'effectuer ?

Quel est le contenu propre à la réécriture ?

Un écrivain dolois pouvait y raconter aussi bien :

- des épisodes de la vie du saint pendant sa phase insulaire, si l'on accepte l'idée qu'il est allé se renseigner sur place. En Prol.2, il ne mentionne cependant que le volet continental de la vie du saint : « citra mare in Britannia ac Romania » (« de ce côté-ci de la mer en Bretagne et en Roumanie ») ;
- que des épisodes supplémentaires sur la vie de Samson sur le continent, ainsi que des événements survenus sur le continent après la mort du saint.

Quel fut son programme de travail ? Le Dolois donne plusieurs indications sur la nature de ses interventions. À plusieurs reprises, il indique qu'il ne conservera qu'une petite sélection des actes merveilleux du saint (Prol.4 ; II.1, 6 et 14) ; c'est un lieu commun qui peut venir sous la plume de tout hagiographe bien né – il n'y a pas grand chose à en tirer ici. Mais il est possible d'être plus précis, car le remanieur annonce une entreprise à deux volets : intervenir sur le texte de la **Vita primigenia* d'une part, et ajouter un livre II d'autre part. Reprenons ces deux facettes de son travail.

- Intervenir sur le texte de la *primigenia* :
 - II.6 : intervenir au début et à la fin du livre I : « in principio ac fine alterius epistoliumculae » (« au début et à la fin de l'autre petite épître »). Au début, ce pourrait être ajouter la préface ; et à la fin, le récit de la mort du saint (en I.61) ? Le remanieur indique en effet qu'il a raconté au livre I la fin bienheureuse du saint : « ab electi eiusdem principio beato illius tenus fine » (« des débuts de l'élu jusqu'à sa fin bienheureuse ») (en II.2) ; et encore en II.5 : « ad beatum usque finem vitae huius » (« jusqu'au terme bienheureux de cette vie »). La mort de Samson n'est pas annoncée dans la table des chapitres. Mais cette donnée pourrait avoir été insérée dans un alinéa hybride, mi-conclusion du livre I, mi-introduction au livre II (aujourd'hui numéroté II.1).
 - Remettre sur le métier une œuvre préexistante : « in secundi huius opusculi iteratione » (« dans la reprise de cette seconde oeuvre ») (en II.6) ; « opus retexere » (en II.11).

⁵⁴ Jankulak, « The absent saint », 209. Mais il n'y a pas apparence que ce monastère ait été fondé par Samson ; dans la *VIS*, on le voit placé sous l'autorité de l'abbé Eltutus (I.7s).

⁵⁵ Le remanieur a trouvé un texte attribué à Hénoc dans un monastère fondé par Samson dans les Cornouailles, si l'on en croit *VIS* Prol.2 ; il a ensuite séjourné à Llanilltud Fawr (I.7ex).

- Corriger le livre I : « Finit in nomine Domini. Usque hic sicut valuimus correximus » (« Fin, au nom du Seigneur. Comme nous avons pu, nous avons corrigé jusqu'ici »). Il s'agit bien d'une souscription, et non pas d'un colophon. Cette souscription est présente uniquement dans les deux manuscrits les plus anciens (Metz, BM 195 et Mazarine 1708). Les copistes de ces deux manuscrits n'ont pas corrigé le texte eux-mêmes : ils ont probablement recopié la souscription de leur modèle. Il est impossible de savoir à coup sûr si ces deux témoins dépendent l'un de l'autre⁵⁶ ; ils dépendent (peut-être séparément) d'un ancêtre commun qui portait déjà cette souscription. Ce qui laisse en suspens trois questions :
- À *quand* remonte cette opération de correction ? À la fin du X^e siècle au plus tard, d'après l'âge des manuscrits les plus anciens. Mais est-ce l'œuvre d'un remanieur dolois ? C'est possible, mais difficile à prouver ; un correcteur aurait senti le besoin de retoucher certains « écarts » par rapport à sa pratique du latin écrit (et peut-être aussi oral). Au milieu du IX^e siècle, un autre remanieur de la *Vita Samsonis* a doté son texte (BHL 7481, 7483) de 46 titres de chapitres originaux, sans dépendance formelle apparente des titres de chapitres de la Vie ancienne. Est-ce explicable comme résultat normal d'une refonte complète de l'œuvre ? N'aurait-il disposé que d'un exemplaire de la Vie ancienne dépourvu de table ?
- *En quoi* a consisté l'opération de correction ? Une intervention sur la forme du texte ? Sur le fond du récit ? Ou les deux ?⁵⁷ Il ne faut sans doute pas imaginer le travail d'un grammairien ou d'un critique professionnel cherchant à rétablir une orthodoxie orthographique ou syntaxique⁵⁸. Sur le fond, il est possible de reconnaître certaines interventions du remanieur sur la recension primitive, comme on le verra plus loin.
- *Pourquoi* la souscription se trouve-t-elle à cet endroit du texte et non pas à la fin de l'œuvre ? Est-ce parce que la révision n'a touché que le livre I ? Il existait apparemment un texte à réviser, qui s'étendait jusque là. Le « Finit in nomine Domini » serait-il alors l'explicit originel de la *primigenia* ? Il est tentant de penser que révision et réécriture ont été faites en même temps. Le syntagme *usque hic* est très voisin de *huc usque* (« jusqu'ici »), un signal bien connu, annonciateur d'une continuation⁵⁹ ; mais il ne peut à lui seul étayer une datation particulière.

⁵⁶ Le manuscrit de Paris ne peut pas dépendre de celui de Metz ; mais l'inverse demeure théoriquement possible. Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 321.

⁵⁷ Sowerby, « The Lives of Saint Samson », 25, a sans doute raison de choisir cette dernière possibilité.

⁵⁸ Sauf preuve du contraire, c'était déjà le cas dans l'Antiquité : Zetzel, *Latin Textual Criticism*, 230.

⁵⁹ Voir les nombreux exemples, pour la période des IV^e-X^e siècles, analysés par Bernard, « Benoît d'Aniane », 10-23.

- Ajouter un livre II : cette addition poursuit plusieurs objectifs, explicités au chapitre 2 du second livre :
 - enrichir l'œuvre originale par l'addition d'un supplément : « opusculo augmentum dare » (« donner un complément à ce petit ouvrage ») ;
 - couvrir l'ensemble de la vie du saint, du début jusqu'à la fin, pour donner suite à la requête de l'évêque Tigernomagle : « te ... volente ac suggerente » (symétriquement au « te ... suggerente et ... volente » [« selon ta volonté et à ta suggestion »] de sa préface, Prol.3) ;
 - actualiser le dossier de Samson par addition de miracles récents, afin de compléter le premier livre : « de cotidianis ac praesentibus eiusdem virtutibus, cum praeteritis supra iam scriptis non inconvenienter concordantibus » (« de ses miracles ordinaires et actuels, en parfait accord avec ses miracles passés rapportés ci-dessus »). La même idée revient en II.6 : « aliqua adhuc vel pauca sunt replicanda » (« il faut rapporter encore quelques traits quoique peu nombreux »). Enfin, et peut-être même surtout,
 - fournir une matière apte à honorer le saint au jour de son anniversaire ; d'où le ton résolument parénétique du livre II. L'auteur y interpelle ses *fratres carissimi/dilectissimi* à six reprises (II.2, 4, 6, 11, 14 et 16) ; ou *fratres mei* tout court (II.5 et 11).

L'ensemble de ces opérations doit s'entendre comme un programme d'action à partir d'une œuvre préexistante ; fut-il suivi d'effets vérifiables ? De quelles sources le remanieur a-t-il disposé pour réaliser son projet ? Il invoque un dossier documentaire particulièrement étoffé ; notamment grâce à un voyage d'information au pays natal de Samson. Évidemment, si ce voyage est fictif, beaucoup de choses deviennent illusoires ...

Sources orales

Il est remarquable de constater qu'à neuf reprises au cours de la Vie ancienne, le rédacteur prend la parole à la première personne du singulier, avec EGO, pour invoquer un témoignage personnel : l'hagiographe se présente lui-même comme un témoin direct. J'étais là, j'ai vu, j'ai entendu, j'ai appris, j'ai touché. Mais qui parle ? Une liste complète de ces marques d'énonciation est fournie dans le tableau suivant⁶⁰.

Qui sent le besoin, à neuf reprises, de garantir de la sorte le sérieux de son information par une notation personnelle ? En Prol.1 et en II.14, c'est évidemment le remanieur qui parle, à propos d'évêques de Dol relativement tardifs par rapport à Samson. Mais ailleurs, c'est-à-dire pour sept autres éléments du récit, tous situés avant le passage de Samson sur le continent ? Qui, de Hénoc ou du Dolois, pouvait

⁶⁰ Une quinzaine d'autres cas de prises de parole en discours direct, avec EGO, apparaît dans la *Vita* ; mais il ne s'agit jamais d'un discours de renforcement pour faire valoir le sérieux des sources. Ces discours directs prêtés aux divers personnages (Samson lui-même, dans une bonne moitié des cas) ne se rencontrent que dans le premier livre ; l'exception de II.7 à 9 n'en est pas une, car ce passage a été importé de la *primigenia*, de l'aveu même du rédacteur.

ressentir un besoin aussi pressant d'établir sa crédibilité ? Le Gallois Hénoc, pour un public insulaire ? Ou le Dolois, pour un public continental ?

Tableau 3.3. Prises de parole à la première personne du singulier, avec EGO, dans la Vie ancienne de s. Samson de Dol

Référence	Témoignage	Contexte
Prol.1	« EGO ... tuisque exhortationibus provocatus, ... praebebo »	Acte d'obéissance envers l'évêque Tigernomagle
I.7ex	« In cuius magnifico monasterio EGO fui »	Monastère d'Eltutus à Llanilltud Fawr
I.11	« Quam questionem EGO novi, sed insinuare praetermitto »	Question d'exégèse biblique
I.16	« Cuius malum factum EGO scio, sed nomen scire non potui ⁶¹ »	À propos d'un mauvais prêtre, neveu d'Eltutus
I.20ex	« In qua insula et EGO fui »	Au monastère de l'abbé Piro à Caldey Island
I.41ex	« Quando EGO fui in Britannia »	À un oratoire dans un ermitage fondé par Samson
I.42	« Quod indiculum EGO audivi lectum »	Avant que Samson ne devienne abbé de Llandaff ⁶²
I.48	« In quo monte et EGO fui signumque ... adoravi et mea manu palpavi ⁶³ »	Lieu d'une victoire sur des païens dans les Cornouailles
II.14ex	« A quodam egregio fratre ... EGO didici »	Nouvelle d'un incendie à Dol, sous l'évêque Leucher

Ces notations personnelles nous paraissent plutôt attribuables au Dolois. Si l'on accepte l'idée que l'hagiographe continental a parcouru le Pays de Galles et les Cornouailles pour se documenter, on comprend mieux qu'il ait voulu bien mettre en évidence avec insistance la qualité personnelle de son témoignage. Et comme la première et la dernière apparition de cette tournure avec EGO sont certainement de

⁶¹ Une formule voisine en Prol.3 : « in mea memoria negare non potui » (« je n'ai pas pu refuser de me souvenir »).

⁶² C'est la localisation retenue par Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 208, n.2, pour ce monastère soi-disant construit par s. Germain d'Auxerre ; Fawtier (éd.), *La Vie de saint Samson*, 52, n.1, le situe plutôt à Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major).

⁶³ Il existe bien une pierre gravée d'un chrisme, datée des VI^e/VII^e siècles, qui pourrait correspondre à celle que le remanieur a touchée ; elle se trouve dans une paroisse dédiée à s. Samson, à South Hill dans les Cornouailles. Cf. Olson, *Early Monasteries in Cornwall*, 12s. et 16s. On trouve aussi une croix gravée en Glamorgan (Llantwit Major 3) portant le nom d'un abbé Samson ; elle vise cependant un homonyme trop tardif : Edwards, « Early-medieval inscribed stones », 34. Ce fragment de croix pourrait même ne dater que du X^e/XI^e siècle selon Edwards, « Celtic saints », 237. Les derniers éditeurs résument la discussion à propos de la date de ce monument (ECMW 223/G65) et s'arrêtent finalement au VIII^e siècle tardif : Redknap et Lewis, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones*, I.377-82. Mais Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 124 (Illustration 3.1) et 138 (Table 3.3), est disposé à en remonter la date jusqu'au milieu du VIII^e siècle. L'érection d'une croix en commémoration d'un moment important de la vie d'un saint est une tradition bien connue au haut Moyen Âge, des deux côtés de la Manche, comme l'a montré Wood, « Anglo-Saxon Otley », 28s. et ses références.

la plume du remanieur⁶⁴, il y a de fortes chances que les sept autres soient au moins des retouches ponctuelles à la *primigenia*, sinon des parties de chapitres interpolées dans le premier livre⁶⁵. Dans tous ces sept cas, il s'agit d'éléments du récit situés au Pays de Galles ou dans les Cornouailles ; nous avons naguère suggéré de voir dans cette séquence l'esquisse du trajet parcouru par l'auteur⁶⁶.

À ces indications personnelles, s'ajoutent plusieurs mentions de sources orales :

- Prol.2 : « venerabilis senex semper ante me ... pie legere ac diligenter faciebat » (« le vénérable vieillard ... en faisait la lecture sans cesse devant moi pieusement et scrupuleusement »). Le Dolois a donc entendu lire, ou plus largement pris connaissance du texte de la *primigenia*⁶⁷, à l'occasion d'un séjour dans un monastère que Samson « ultra mare ... fundaverat » (« il avait fondé ... outre-mer »). On retrouve ici encore l'ambiguïté d'un relais assuré par un grand vieillard ...
- Prol.4 : l'auteur s'est informé « apud sanctissimos ac compertos admodum viros » (« auprès d'hommes très saints et bien informés ») (une tournure équivalente se trouve encore en II.8 et II.12).
- I.7ex : à l'occasion de son séjour dans un monastère gallois, le remanieur a recueilli des témoignages locaux à propos de l'abbé Eltutus : « referentibus nobis catholicis fratribus » (« selon ce que nous ont rapporté des moines catholiques »).
- I.42 : « ut aiunt », à propos d'une tradition qui attribue à s. Germain d'Auxerre la fondation d'un monastère au Pays de Galles (Llandaff ?). Cet alinéa porte en effet la marque du remanieur, à cause de son contexte immédiat ; la fin du chapitre précédent et le début du chapitre suivant appartiennent à un même ensemble. À la fin de I.41, l'écrivain qui prend la parole est le Dolois (« quando ego fui in Britannia » [« quand j'ai été en Bretagne »]) ; au cours du chapitre 42 du premier livre, il se met à nouveau en scène (« indiculum ego audivi lectum » [« une lettre que j'ai personnellement entendu lire »]). Le début de I.43 assure la transition entre la réunion d'un synode indiquée à la fin de I.42 et la vision annoncée par l'article 35 de la table des chapitres et racontée au chapitre 43 ; de plus, le début du chapitre 43 fait allusion à la fête annuelle de la Chaire de s. Pierre (« illo annuali festo » ; 22 février) dont il n'est question qu'à la fin du chapitre 42.

⁶⁴ Burkitt, « St. Samson of Dol », 48, ne les mentionne pas dans son tableau récapitulatif des apparitions de EGO ; mais il comprend, à juste titre (p. 49), que la récitation des noms des parents du saint pendant la messe (en I.1) a dû être entendue dans l'île (à Llantwit ?), et non pas à Dol.

⁶⁵ Fawtier (éd.), *La Vie de saint Samson*, 33, considère seulement I.7, 41 et 48 comme les traces d'une enquête personnelle de l'auteur, sans indiquer comment il dispose des autres occurrences d'*ego*. Ont eu raison de les attribuer toutes à un seul auteur : Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 9, et Olson, « The early hagiography of Saint Samson », 125s. ; ainsi que Sowerby, « The Lives of Saint Samson », 7s.

⁶⁶ Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 293. Dans la *VHS*, une seule occurrence de ces EGO a survécu (sans doute par inadvertance), à la fin de I.16 : « in quo monte et ego fui, et imaginem adoravi, manuque propria palpavi » (« j'ai été moi-même sur cette colline, et j'ai adoré cette image, je l'ai touchée de ma propre main ») (= *VHS*, I.48). Il en faudrait davantage pour croire que le remanieur du IX^e siècle est allé lui aussi se documenter Outre-Manche.

⁶⁷ Faire lire ou entendre lire peut s'employer au sens de « prendre connaissance », comme le note Van Uytanghe, « Les voies communicationnelles », II.690-93.

- II.1 : allusion vague à ce que l'auteur a entendu : « *plura multum scimus et audivimus* » (« nous qui en savons et en avons appris beaucoup plus »). Simple allégation apparentée au topos « *de multis pauca* » (« un petit nombre de faits parmi une multitude »).
- II.3 : le rayonnement de la sainteté de Samson est connu par des « *verissimis testimoniis* » (« selon des témoignages très véridiques ») génériques.
- II.8 : Samson démasque un imposteur, d'après la relation de moines d'un monastère cornouaillais fondé par le saint : « *ut mihi comperti ac religiosi ... tradiderunt* » (« ainsi que me l'ont rapporté des gens bien informés et religieux »). Leur témoignage oral s'ajoute ici à celui de la *primigenia* : « *ut ... litterae ipsius loco ultra mare catholice conscriptae tradiderunt* » (« comme l'ont rapporté les lettres écrites selon la foi catholique dans son monastère d'outre-mer »). Dans la même phrase, le remanieur invoque donc une source orale et une source écrite, qui se trouve être la *primigenia* !
- II.10 : le récit d'un miracle de punition d'un voleur (à Dol), peu après la mort de Samson, est introduit par la formule « *indubitanter novimus* » (en II.9ex) et conclu par la formule « *indubitanter sciamus* » (II.10ex) (« nous savons sans le moindre doute »).
- II.12 : les pratiques de jeûne de Samson lui furent rapportées par des gens bien informés : « *ut ferebant de illo qui in sua vita satis conperiti erant* » (« comme le rapportaient à son sujet des gens bien informés sur sa vie »)⁶⁸. Mais ces indications se trouvent déjà chez Hénoc, au chapitre 10 du premier livre. Une répétition volontaire, dans le cadre d'une homélie ? Un doublon (dans le même but ?) apparaît dans le même chapitre du second livre : le Dolois cite cette fois littéralement Hénoc (I.21) : « *non diebus, non noctibus, ab orationibus et a colloquiis Dei cessabat* » (« ni jour ni nuit il ne cessait de prier et de s'entretenir avec Dieu »)⁶⁹. Il ne s'est peut-être pas rendu compte qu'il remployait alors Rufin, *Historia monachorum*, I.1.5 ; les autres emprunts probables ou possibles à cette *Historia monachorum* appartiennent tous à la partie du texte attribuable à Hénoc⁷⁰. Comme en II.8, l'auteur combine ici source orale et source écrite dans un même chapitre.
- II.12 : « *tempus ... sic peregris se audivimus* » (« nous avons ainsi appris qu'il avait passé le temps »), à propos des habitudes de retraite du saint pendant la période pascale, selon les mêmes informateurs que pour ses pratiques de jeûne.
- II.14 : un récit de miracle *post mortem* survenu au monastère de Dol a été communiqué par un témoin direct : « *a quodam egregio fratre, qui interfuisse se testabatur, ego didici* » (« je l'ai appris pour ma part d'un moine éminent qui assurait en avoir été témoin »).

⁶⁸ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 261, traduit par « ceux qui l'avaient bien connu de son vivant », ce qui va au-delà du texte ; il vaut mieux parler de « gens bien informés », comme il l'a fait en Prol.4 et II.8.

⁶⁹ Un énoncé analogue se lit encore en I.47 : « *Deum diebus ac noctibus incessanter precabatur* » (« il priait Dieu sans cesse, jour et nuit »).

⁷⁰ Soit en I.5 (= Rufin I.1.17) ; I.21 (= Rufin I.1.5) ; I.32 (= Rufin I.4.7) ; et I.48 (= Rufin VII.7.1).

Sources écrites

Le remanieur invoque deux documents écrits : un *indiculus* et surtout une *Vita primigenia*.

- I.42 : « quod indiculum ego audiui lectum » : l'invitation écrite envoyée à Samson pour le faire venir à un synode – où il sera finalement consacré évêque (I.43/44) – a-t-elle existé ? Il est permis d'en douter. La réécriture de la *VHS*, I.13 (*BHL* 7481, milieu du IX^e siècle), fait disparaître cet écrit problématique.
- Le prologue du premier livre est explicite sur l'existence d'une version primitive rédigée sur le continent par Hénoc (« congruis stilis » [« dans un style approprié »]) et ramenée par lui Outre-Manche (Prol.2). Le remanieur l'a trouvée dans un monastère cornouaillais fondé par Samson (Prol.4 ; St Sampson of Golant ?).
- I.38 : « referentibus autem mihi de eo litteris transmarinis supra jam insignatis » (« d'après ce que me rapporte à son sujet le texte d'outre-mer signalé ci-dessus ») (renvoyant aux indications du prologue). Nous apprenons ici qu'un abbé irlandais a suivi Samson sur le continent ; quelle est la source de cette information ? La *primigenia*⁷¹ ! Dans ces conditions, celui qui dit « certum teneo » (« je tiens pour certain ») ne peut pas être Hénoc⁷² ; c'est forcément un remanieur qui parle ici, car Hénoc n'aurait pas désigné sa rédaction en disant « litterae transmarinae »⁷³. Dans la même phrase du chapitre 38, le remanieur donne le nom du monastère de Pental (aujourd'hui St-Samson de la Roque, dans l'Eure), nommé nulle part ailleurs dans la Vie ancienne ; bizarrement, l'indication de la fondation de ce monastère situé sur la Seine survient 20 chapitres plus tard, au chapitre I.58 seulement (où il n'est pas désigné par son nom). La dernière phrase du chapitre 38, interpolé par le remanieur à notre avis, se termine d'ailleurs par une soudure : « sed coeptam sequamur » (« mais poursuivons notre entreprise »)⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Cette source ne contenait sans doute pas le nom de l'abbé irlandais ; en tout cas, l'hagiographe de s. Samson avoue l'ignorer : « cuius bona quidem acta ... scio, sed nomen nescio » (« je connais fort bien ses bonnes actions, mais j'ignore son nom ») (I.38). Cette notation rappelle celle de l'auteur de la *Vita s. Sigolene*, IV.27, sans dépendance formelle toutefois : « cuius faciem scio, nomen nescio » (*BHL* 7570 ; seconde moitié du VII^e siècle).

⁷² Cette expression d'une affirmation certaine fait partie des habitudes de langage du remanieur : encore en Prol.3, II.1 et 3. Mais il est vrai que la tournure « pro certo habere » (« tenir pour certain ») se rencontre aussi dans des chapitres attribuables à Hénoc : I.1, 2 et 24. Voir tout de même l'appel à la prudence devant les protestations de véridicité des Anciens : Paschoud, « *Mendacii splendor* », 237s.

⁷³ L'hagiographe n'a pas le monopole de ce syntagme : il se rencontre aussi au début d'une lettre de l'abbesse Eangyth à s. Boniface en 719×22 (éd. Tangl, 21).

⁷⁴ Une telle formule de raccordement se trouve aussi à la fin de I.8, soit au terme d'un passage que nous avons soupçonné d'interpolation : « Sed ad id redeam unde digressus sum » (« Mais il faut que je revienne au point d'où est partie ma digression ») (il s'agit en fait du remploi de Jérôme, *Vita s. Pauli*, 7). Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 268s. Sowerby a senti lui aussi que ce chapitre 8 interrompt le cours normal du récit : « The Lives of St Samson », 5 et 29 ; il rejoint en cela Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 158, n.1.

Enfin le Dolois renvoie aussi au livre I tel qu'il l'a amendé :

- I.52 : « in principio nostri operis jam dicto » (« au début de notre susdit ouvrage ») et « diacono illo de quo jam nos dixisse sufficit » (« avec ce diacre dont nous avons déjà suffisamment parlé »), c'est-à-dire dans le prologue de la Vie ancienne. Ce prologue parle en effet du diacre Hénoc, cousin du saint ; c'est là, et là seulement, qu'il est identifié par son nom et ses qualités (Prol.2).
- II.2 : « praesentibus ejusdem virtutibus, cum praeteritis supra jam scriptis non inconvenienter concordantibus » (« de ses miracles présents, en parfait accord avec ses miracles passés rapportés ci-dessus ») : renvoi aux prodiges de Samson racontés dans le premier livre.
- II.6 : « in principio ac fine alterius epistoliunculae » : renvoi aux additions du remanieur en tête (Prol.) et à la fin (I.61) du premier livre.
- II.7 : « Dubricium in superiore epistula iam memoratum » (« Dubric, déjà mentionné dans la lettre précédente ») : pour introduire un complément à ce qui a déjà été raconté à propos de l'évêque Dubricius en I.13, 33-36 et 43-44. Ce chapitre se termine par un raccordement avec le chapitre suivant : « quod postea veritas probavit rei » (« comme le confirma ensuite la réalité des faits »).
- II.8 : « ut ... litterae ipsius loco ultra mare catholice conscriptae tradiderunt » : allusion au document découvert Outre-Manche dans le monastère cornouaillais fondé par Samson (Prol.2). C'est la fondation ultime de Samson avant sa traversée sur le continent (I.50). Le remanieur annonce ici qu'il va prélever sur la *primigenia* l'histoire du diacre-moine simulateur Morin, qu'il avait d'abord écartée du premier livre.

Voilà les sources – orales et écrites – dont disposait le remanieur pour élaborer la Vie ancienne ; sources dont il a prétendu disposer. Si la *primigenia* a existé, pouvons-nous identifier, au moins partiellement, quels changements lui a apportés le remanieur ? Jusqu'à un certain point, oui ; des changements par addition, par suppression ou par déplacement.

Additions

C'est-à-dire des portions de texte qui *ne peuvent pas* avoir été écrites par Hénoc :

- Prol. : puisque c'est là que sont identifiés Hénoc, Tigernomagle et la *primigenia*. Il s'agit bien ici d'un prologue auctorial, et non pas hagiologique, pour reprendre la typologie établie par François Dolbeau⁷⁵ ; mais il est impossible de savoir s'il remplace ou réécrit un prologue originel par Hénoc.
- I.8 : l'épisode de la mort de l'abbé Eltut, absent de la table des chapitres, fait figure d'interpolation, interrompant la présentation des rapports de Samson enfant avec son maître ; cette scène funèbre est encadrée par des formules de raccordement. En I.7ex, c'est le remanieur qui tient la plume (« ego fui » [« je fus moi-même »]) et qui annonce son intervention : « publicamus in medium » (« nous livrons au public »). En I.8ex, s. Jérôme fournit une

⁷⁵ Dolbeau, « Transformations des prologues », 104s.

phrase de soudure : « Sed ad id redeam unde digressus sum » (« mais il faut que je revienne au point d'où est partie ma digression »)⁷⁶. Quand le récit reprend en I.9, Eltut est toujours vivant. Il est très improbable que le remanieur ait eu connaissance d'un récit écrit relatant les « mirifica gesta » d'Eltut ; la *Vita s. Eltuti* qui nous reste (BHL 4268) ne date que du milieu du XII^e siècle et s'inscrit plutôt dans la dépendance de la *Vita Samsonis*⁷⁷.

- La dernière phrase de I.38 : où l'hagiographe désigne sa source : « litterae transmarinae ».
- La première phrase de I.52 : « recepto itaque suo consobrino, in principio nostri operis iam dicto » (« ainsi, après avoir retrouvé son cousin déjà cité au début de notre ouvrage »). C'est Hénoc qui est désigné ici⁷⁸ ; comme il est nommé en sa qualité de cousin dans la préface du livre I, mais nulle part ailleurs, c'est bien le remanieur qui parle ici.
- La fin du chapitre I.60, où le remanieur répète qu'il n'a pas pu tout dire à propos des prodiges de Samson ; il renvoie à ce chapitre en II.6⁷⁹. Cette dernière référence confirme incidemment que le prologue du premier livre est lui aussi sorti de la plume du Dolois.
- I.61 : ce chapitre ultime du premier livre couvre la mort du saint et le privilège de Dol qui possède son tombeau. Comme la mort de Samson n'est pas signalée dans la table des chapitres, et comme le remanieur est intervenu par une addition à la fin du chapitre 60, il est possible que le chapitre 61 comporte lui aussi une addition. Curieusement, le nom de Dol manque partout ailleurs dans la Vie, sauf à la fin de I.52, au moment de la fondation du monastère ; mais c'est aussi un passage que nous avons suspecté d'interpolation⁸⁰. L'évaluation du statut du chapitre 61 est compliquée par le maniement ambigu des notions juxtaposées de *Britannia* et *Romania*. On peut hésiter sur le sens à donner ici au mot *Britannia* : Armorique, Grande-Bretagne, ou les deux à la fois ? Ce binôme *Britannia/Romania* est utilisé à deux autres reprises par le remanieur, avec des sens contradictoires pour *Britannia* :
 - a) Prol.2 : « citra mare in Britannia ac Romania » (« de ce côté-ci de la mer, en Bretagne et en Romanie ») (Armorique seulement) ;
 - b) II.11 : « apud multos Brittanorum Romanorumque ultra citraque mare » (« chez de nombreux habitants de la Bretagne et de la Romanie, des deux côtés de la mer ») (donc le continent *et* la Grande-Bretagne).

⁷⁶ Jérôme, *Vita s. Pauli*, 7 (BHL 6596).

⁷⁷ Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 328s. Fawtier (éd.), *La Vie de saint Samson*, 38-40, croyait à l'existence d'une *Vita s. Eltuti* ancienne – maintenant perdue. Son avis est encore suivi par Davies, « The saints of South Wales », 382. En faisant de Samson un évêque de Dol, cette *Vita Eltuti* nous semble postérieure à la *VIS*.

⁷⁸ Jusque là, Samson apparaît souvent en compagnie d'un diacre anonyme ; mais cet anonyme n'est pas Hénoc, car ce dernier n'accède au diaconat qu'en I.59. Cf. les références dans Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 285-87.

⁷⁹ C'est donc à juste titre que R. Sowerby a senti que le chapitre I.60 contient un *disorderly addendum* : « The Lives of St Samson », 24.

⁸⁰ Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 272s.

- La table des chapitres achève d'embrouiller la question : son article 42 vise le chapitre 61, mais remplace le couple *Britannia/Romania* par *Europa*⁸¹, ce qui exclut les Bretons insulaires⁸².
- Les sept additions ponctuelles avec EGO, intercalées dans le livre I pour renforcer la crédibilité du récit (voir le Tableau 3.3 ci-dessus).
- Le premier chapitre du second livre sert à la fois de conclusion au premier livre et d'introduction au second ; il est rédigé dans un style apparenté au prologue du livre I ; l'évêque Tigernomagle est à nouveau nommé (comme *papa*).
- II.1 : « de multis pauca colligere sufficiens putavi » (« j'ai jugé suffisant de rassembler un petit nombre de faits parmi une multitude »). L'annonce d'une sélection de hauts faits constitue un lieu commun assez habituel en hagiographie ; une tournure équivalente revient en II.14 : « sufficiant ista paucula verba de plurimis collecta » (« suffisent ces brefs propos condensés d'un très grand nombre »).
- II.2 à 6 : un sermon cohérent, adressé à l'évêque Tigernomagle ; il s'appuie sur des observations contemporaines (« nostris temporibus », en II.3) ; mais cette notation possède une valeur plus rhétorique que chronologique. Ce segment se termine par l'annonce d'additions d'éléments nouveaux (« aliqua adhuc vel pauca sunt replicanda » [« il faut encore rappeler quelques traits, quoique peu nombreux »], en II.6).
- II.10 à 16 : exécution du programme annoncé dans la préface du second livre, avec addition de trois nouveaux prodiges, dont deux *post mortem*.

Coupures

C'est-à-dire des éléments de la *primigenia* qui auraient été supprimés à l'occasion de la réécriture :

- les énoncés de la table des chapitres n'annoncent pas d'épisodes absents de la Vie ancienne au premier livre : aucune perte substantielle n'est donc repérable à l'aide de la table. Pourtant, au livre II chapitres 7-9, le remanieur raconte un épisode qu'il dit avoir trouvé dans les « litterae ... ultra mare ... conscriptae » (en II.8), donc dans la *primigenia* ; or cette historiette manque dans la table ... De deux choses l'une : ou bien le Dolois a élagué la table en conséquence, ou bien la table fut dressée à partir de l'état actuel du premier livre.
- dans une lettre non datée de l'abbé Duine, citée par Joseph Loth, l'abbé avance l'hypothèse d'une coupure de la *primigenia* par le remanieur, coupure réparée ensuite par la *VIIS* (BHL 7483), à propos d'un accord passé entre Pental et St-Germain-des-Prés (*VIIS*, II.10 et 11)⁸³. L'idée d'un tel

⁸¹ Toutes les autres occurrences d'*Europa* désignent le continent, sans ambiguïté : art.39 ; I.46, 47, 52 et 53. Discussion récente de ces termes par Merdrignac, « Des 'royaumes doubles' », 45-49. P. Riché n'utilise pas le témoignage de la *VIS* dans « L'idée d'Europe ».

⁸² Sur ce point, voir les lectures divergentes de Coumert, « Le peuplement de l'Armorique », 30s., et de Merdrignac, *D'une Bretagne à l'autre*, 127-31.

⁸³ Loth, « La Vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson, abbé-évêque de Dol », 324 ; réimpr. page 24. Sur cet épisode, cf. Merdrignac, « Saint Samson et saint Germain ».

rapprochement a pu venir à l'esprit de l'hagiographe du IX^e siècle du fait que ces deux saints, Samson et Germain, ont signé ensemble les actes du concile de Paris en 562. Mais contrairement à Duine, nous ne croyons pas que le synchronisme de Samson et Germain († 576) suffise pour conclure que l'hagiographe dolois du milieu du IX^e siècle disposait d'une version de la *primigenia* plus complète que celle que le premier remanieur laisse apercevoir dans la Vie dite ancienne dans son état présent.

- dans cette même lettre, Duine indique – à tort à notre avis – que la *primigenia* décrivait la destruction de quatre serpents, alors qu'elle n'en raconte que trois ; c'est que Samson doit s'y reprendre à deux fois pour éliminer définitivement le troisième serpent (en I.58 et 60).⁸⁴

Déplacements

Le rédacteur de la Vie dite ancienne n'a pas respecté partout la progression du récit de la *primigenia* :

- Au début du livre I, une certaine discordance apparaît entre l'ordre des titres dans la table des chapitres et le déroulement effectif du récit. Mais cette perturbation peut être assez ancienne ; nous ne pouvons pas l'attribuer avec assurance au remanieur⁸⁵.
- Ce qui relève assurément de l'intervention du remanieur, c'est le déplacement de l'épisode du diacre simulateur Morin. Cette historiette se trouvait à l'origine dans la *primigenia* ; mais nous la lisons aujourd'hui au milieu du livre II, chapitres 7 à 9⁸⁶. Apparemment, le rédacteur a eu un repentir ; il a décidé de réintroduire un élément qu'il avait d'abord négligé. Et il identifie sa source en II.8 : les « litterae transmarinae ». C'est une initiative – et un langage – qui conviennent au remanieur, mais pas à Hénoc.

Pouvons-nous aller plus loin dans l'identification des modifications apportées par le remanieur ? Est-ce que la table des chapitres peut y aider ? Ce chantier est encore ouvert ; l'exploitation de cet élément paratextuel marque en effet beaucoup de retard par rapport à l'analyse de la *vita* proprement dite. Le simple fait du décalage entre le nombre d'articles de la table (42) et le nombre de chapitres découpés (séparément) par Mabillon (61) appelle une réflexion qui n'est pas terminée. Pour l'instant, l'étude des conditions de circulation de l'information dans la Vie ancienne permet de compléter, corriger ou nuancer les conclusions auxquelles nous étions arrivé dans notre article de 2001.

Globalement, les canaux de communication des deux auteurs putatifs n'ont pas la même valeur. Pour Hénoc, la possibilité de sources écrites est très incertaine ; les sources orales possibles, mais invérifiables. Pour le Dolois, une *primigenia* écrite est indispensable pour comprendre sa manière de travailler ; ses sources orales sont validées par son engagement personnel (notamment les affirmations avec EGO). Quelles sont les conséquences de tout ceci sur la chronologie de la genèse de la *VIS* ?

⁸⁴ Le compte est bon dans le catalogue compilé par Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 187s.

⁸⁵ Discussion de ce point par Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 85, et Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 321.

⁸⁶ Ce segment avait déjà attiré l'attention de l'abbé Duine, en tant que pièce détachée de la *primigenia* : « Origines bretonnes », 146. Le chanoine Gilbert H. Doble s'est lui aussi étonné de voir réapparaître ici Dubricius : « Saint Dubricius », 57s.

La Circulation de l'information
Chronologie de la Vie ancienne

Comment tirer parti des résultats acquis par cette radiographie de la *VIS* comme système d'information pour préciser la datation de la Vie ancienne ? Quelle que soit la date adoptée pour la rédaction ou le remaniement de la Vie ancienne, on se heurte à la même difficulté : cette œuvre apparaît dans une zone de relatif silence documentaire⁸⁷. Comment faire parler ce témoin orphelin ? Dans quel contexte ? À quoi le comparer ? Où conduit la tentative de croiser, d'une part, la succession des agents de transmission des traditions relatives au saint et, d'autre part, les conditions concrètes de circulation de l'information sur Samson ?

D'abord, il faut reconnaître que le ou les écrivains au travail sont des professionnels de l'écriture, pas des débutants. Ils connaissent les codes du discours hagiographique et ils les respectent :

- pardonnez ma maladresse et mon indignité – le topos de l'humilité ;
- déclaration d'obéissance envers un supérieur – le commanditaire ;
- assurances répétées de la qualité des sources d'information ;
- je raconterai peu de choses parmi tant d'autres – *pauca de multis* ;
- le saint lève les yeux au ciel pour obtenir une faveur divine ;
- le saint réclame la discrétion après avoir réalisé un prodige ;
- même la désignation d'une version primitive retrouvée par hasard ou par chance fait partie des lieux communs !

Ce qui ne signifie pas pour autant que ces écrivains soient de très forts latinistes⁸⁸ ; déjà en 1918, Duine disait que les écrivains bretons utilisent les mêmes outils et les mêmes procédés que tout le monde. Dans le cas de s. Samson, ils ne sont toutefois pas sur un pied d'égalité du point de vue des canaux d'information qui ont alimenté leur rédaction : que ce soit pour les sources orales ou écrites, la position d'un remanieur doit paraître mieux assurée que celle de Hénoc⁸⁹.

De deux choses l'une :

- ou bien nous avons une œuvre unitaire : un seul auteur, un projet, une unité d'inspiration, un destinataire. C'est l'idée du dernier éditeur⁹⁰, après beaucoup d'autres. Et alors, une seule date suffira ;

⁸⁷ Constat bien avisé dressé par Brett, « Brittany and the Carolingian Empire », 268s. Sur la faiblesse de l'écriture hagiographique au Pays de Galles avant le XI^e siècle, cf. Lapidge & Love, « The Latin hagiography », III.273.

⁸⁸ Voir l'évaluation de la langue de la Vie ancienne par Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 63-84, et son lexique, 277-92.

⁸⁹ Sur les précautions à prendre dans l'utilisation des traditions orales pour l'histoire de la Bretagne, cf. Brett, « Soldiers, saints, and states? », 15s. Voir aussi les réactions à cet article par Bourguès, « Quelques mots » ; et Bourguès, « Les origines bretonnes ». Et surtout la recension de Pierre-Yves Lambert, dans *Études celtiques* 32 (2012) 359-67. Ultime réponse de B. Merdrignac dans un article posthume : « D'une Bretagne à l'autre ».

⁹⁰ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 87.

- ou bien nous avons une œuvre composite, en deux strates textuelles : un récit primitif (la *primigenia*) + une entreprise de réécriture. Il faut alors proposer deux dates de rédaction.

Considérons les deux hypothèses à tour de rôle, tant du point de vue des acteurs que du point de vue du contenu.

Première hypothèse :

si la Vie ancienne est une œuvre unitaire, au moins globalement

Du point de vue des *acteurs* de la transmission des traditions

Si nous acceptons la chronologie des étapes de la transmission, de cousin à neveu et de vieillard à vieillard, il est impossible d'aller plus loin que la fin du VII^e siècle, dans les meilleures des circonstances. Or il est exclu que la Vie ait été rédigée aussi tôt, car l'auteur a incorporé des influences formelles empruntées à des œuvres qui n'existaient pas encore ou qui n'étaient pas disponibles, comme on le verra plus bas. Par conséquent, il est impossible d'utiliser *stricto sensu* l'enchaînement des témoins et participants successifs pour reconstituer une chronologie crédible ; la *VIS* est forcément plus tardive que la fin du VII^e siècle. Hénoc et compagnie deviennent alors un artifice rhétorique pour rassurer le lecteur et une caution morale donnée en garantie de véracité. Si Hénoc n'est pas une personne physique, d'où vient le nom attribué à cet écrivain ? Dans les circonstances, une influence de l'anthroponymie biblique paraît la solution la plus satisfaisante (Hénoch), d'autant qu'elle se fait aussi sentir sur le nom du saint et de ses deux parents (Amon et Anna)⁹¹. Mais cela ne compromet pas nécessairement pour autant la possibilité d'une tradition écrite sur s. Samson, antérieurement à ce que nous appelons la « Vie ancienne ».

Quant aux évêques Leucher (II.15) et Tigernomagle (Prol.1 et II.1), il est difficile de croire qu'ils aient été des évêques de Dol au VII^e siècle⁹². Le diocèse de Dol était-il même dûment constitué à cette période ? La Vie ancienne ne présente pas Samson comme évêque *de Dol*. La configuration territoriale bizarre de ce qui finira par constituer le diocèse de Dol évoque plutôt une mise en place progressive et relativement tardive, au détriment de ses voisins immédiats, Alet principalement⁹³ ; de toute façon, il est difficile de connaître l'extension géographique de l'autorité épiscopale des premiers prélats de Dol, comme l'a bien vu Clare Stancliffe⁹⁴. L'évêque Leucher a précédé de

⁹¹ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 31s. et 83. De son côté, John R. Davies spéculé sur la présence éventuelle de jeux de mots hébraïques dans l'anthroponymie de la famille de Samson : « Old Testament personal names », 187.

⁹² Il est curieux que leurs noms aient disparu dans la réécriture de la *VIS* au milieu du IX^e siècle ; avait-on déjà oublié leur souvenir à Dol ? Le Tigernomagle qui assure brièvement la succession épiscopale de s. Paul Aurélien (sous l'influence formelle de la *VIS* ?) ne peut pas être la même personne : *Vita s. Pauli Aureliani*, 35 et 62 (BHL 6585 ; achevée en 884). Nous ne croyons pas que Leucher et Tigernomagle aient été des successeurs immédiats de Samson ; *contra*, Smith « Maglorius ».

⁹³ Bernard Tanguy reste assez vague sur les origines du diocèse de Dol : « De l'origine des évêchés bretons », 20. B. Merdrignac et L. Plouchart esquissent une constitution très progressive d'un espace diocésain rattaché à Dol : « La fondation des évêchés bretons », 150s. Il est douteux que le siège de Dol ait pu s'imposer sur l'ensemble de la Bretagne avant l'époque carolingienne ; *contra* : Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 24s. Mais nous n'irions pas jusqu'à supposer que le diocèse d'Alet fut créé au début du IX^e siècle, dans le but de concurrencer celui de Dol, comme le propose Gendry, « L'immunité », 63s. et 85. Sur ce dernier point, voir Poulin, « Recherches récentes ».

⁹⁴ Stancliffe, « Christianity amongst the Britons », 443.

peu Tigernomagle sur le siège de Dol, car le rédacteur a connu un témoin direct d'un prodige survenu sous Leucher. Quand a vécu Tigernomagle ? Nous ne retenons pas une quasi-homonymie avec un Tigermal mort en 707 d'après les Annales de Lorsch et de Moselle⁹⁵ ; ce Tigermal au rang inconnu ne saurait pas prouver l'existence d'un diocèse de Dol vers 700 ; et encore moins vers 600⁹⁶. La question la plus difficile est de savoir à partir de quand a existé un diocèse de Dol assez structuré pour lancer une enquête outre-mer sur la vie de son saint patron ; manifestement, on n'en savait pas grand-chose à Dol, car la *primigenia* n'était pas disponible sur place. Il a fallu aller la découvrir dans les Cornouailles ; l'auteur(-remanieur) tient à le faire savoir.

Du point de vue du *contenu* des données accumulées sur le saint

La thèse de l'œuvre unitaire soulève des difficultés importantes. Non seulement les allusions à une recension primitive (les « *litterae transmarinae* ») seraient un écran de fumée, réduites au rang de simple topos ; mais encore toutes les annonces de retouches apportées à un texte primitif (par addition, par réduction ou par déplacement) seraient une mystification⁹⁷. Par son contenu, chacun des deux livres possède assurément une personnalité propre : un premier livre biographique, un second livre parénétique. Mais au milieu du livre II, le prédicateur s'arrête pour annoncer qu'il retourne dans les « *litterae transmarinae* » afin de récupérer une tranche de vie de Samson omise dans le livre I. Pourquoi faire une telle référence à une recension primitive, si elle n'a pas existé ? Il faudrait alors créditer l'auteur unique de beaucoup d'habileté pour travestir ainsi le processus de fabrication de la *Vita* à l'aide de relais plus ou moins imaginaires, et de beaucoup de cynisme pour leurrer son commanditaire et abuser son public. Dans quel but ? Il paraît décidément impossible d'attribuer à un seul auteur la totalité des indications de sources que nous avons passées en revue⁹⁸.

Deuxième hypothèse :

si la Vie ancienne porte des traces de remaniement(s)

Quelques chercheurs ont par le passé essayé d'imaginer divers scénarios de réécriture. Il y a un siècle exactement, Baring-Gould et Fisher postulaient l'existence d'une recension primitive (maintenant perdue ; leur version A), réécrite pour donner notre Vie dite ancienne ; selon eux, les deux états seraient attribuables à un seul et même auteur⁹⁹. Sur les entrefaites, l'abbé Duine proposait de considérer comme interpolations l'histoire de la stérilité de la mère de Samson dans le livre I, et les

⁹⁵ Cette hypothèse nouvelle a été proposée par Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 20s. Dans un groupe de noms à consonance celtique, certains défunts reçoivent le titre d'abbé ou d'évêque (sans localisation) ; Tigermal fait partie de ceux qui sont restés sans qualité précise. Pourquoi serait-il évêque ? Et évêque de Dol par surcroît ? Sur le risque qu'il y a de conclure trop machinalement d'un anthroponyme à une origine ethnique, cf. Handley, « Saxons, Britons and Scots », 745. Louis Gougoud croit que Tigermal fait partie d'un groupe d'Irlandais : « Sur les routes de Rome », 268.

⁹⁶ Cette dernière date est proposée par R. Sowerby pour la rédaction d'une première recension de la Vie de s. Samson, dans un monastère qu'il a fondé dans les Cornouailles : « The Lives of St Samson », 28.

⁹⁷ I. Wood croit déceler un ton parodique : « Forgery », 382-84.

⁹⁸ Les discordances observables ou suspensions légitimes ont suscité des réactions contradictoires chez les chercheurs. Fawtier en prend prétexte pour disqualifier globalement le texte ; La Borderie n'en retient que ce qui peut consolider l'hypothèse d'une datation ancienne.

⁹⁹ Baring-Gould & Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints*, IV.131-33.

miracles continentaux du saint dans le livre II¹⁰⁰. Ni Fawtier ni Flobert n'ont fait de place à de telles hypothèses dans leurs éditions respectives. Pour notre part, nous avons essayé d'utiliser la table des chapitres comme levier pour distinguer deux strates textuelles¹⁰¹. La présence de tables de chapitres constitue en effet un usage répandu dans l'hagiographie du haut Moyen Âge ; mais le problème de leur origine – auctoriale ou éditoriale ? – demeure lancinant¹⁰². Dans le cas de s. Samson, la capitulation fut peut-être ajoutée par des scribes, dans un second temps ; mais avant ou après une réécriture ... ? L'histoire du diacre Morin, absente de la table des chapitres, se lit aujourd'hui au milieu du livre II ajouté par le remanieur dolois ; mais il l'a explicitement prélevée sur la *primigenia*. La table actuelle du livre I ne correspond donc pas exactement à l'état primitif du contenu de la première recension ; sauf à supposer que la table fut toujours lacunaire par rapport au contenu réel du texte.

Du point de vue des *acteurs*

Nous avons déjà reconnu plusieurs motifs pour refuser à Hénoc la paternité de certains passages de la Vie ancienne. Un pas supplémentaire peut sans doute être franchi devant des manifestations d'enthousiasme provoqué par la vigueur du culte de s. Samson des deux côtés de la Manche (« apud multos Britannorum Romanorumque ultra citraque mare » en II.11 ; et encore en II.3). À ces témoignages, on peut ajouter une incise ajoutée à la fin de I.41 : le remanieur prend ponctuellement la parole (« ego fui » !) pour signaler la vénération entourant un oratoire installé par Samson au Pays de Galles.¹⁰³ Même si Hénoc a survécu quelques années à son cousin, et même en faisant la part d'une emphase hagiographique naturelle, il serait surprenant que le culte du saint récemment décédé sur le continent ait eu le temps de faire si rapidement des racines aussi vigoureuses Outre-Manche. Il paraît préférable d'attribuer ces propos au remanieur dolois, édifié par ses observations *in situ*, deux siècles plus tard. Car nous croyons à la réalité de ce voyage d'enquête outre-Manche ; nous avons essayé ailleurs de reconstituer dans ses grandes lignes l'itinéraire possible de ce déplacement¹⁰⁴.

Du coup, l'intervention de Hénoc comme personnage historique devient moins nécessaire ; son rôle se transforme en caution morale, comme garantie de sérieux au service du remanieur¹⁰⁵. Sans ce dernier, nous n'aurions même jamais connu le nom de Hénoc. Une fois écartée la possibilité que la *primigenia* ait été composée par un

¹⁰⁰ Duine, « Origines bretonnes », 127 et 146 respectivement. La possibilité d'une petite interpolation en I.9, suggérée par Jacques Raison du Cleuziou relayé par Merdrignac, « La première Vie de saint Samson », 266, paraît indémontrable.

¹⁰¹ Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 263-74.

¹⁰² Poulin, « Un élément négligé », 321ss.

¹⁰³ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 31, n.46, trouve suspecte la messe chantée à Dol à l'autel de s. Samson (en I.1). On ne peut pas utiliser le calendrier métrique d'York (dressé vers 800) comme caution d'une dévotion à s. Samson rapidement installée en milieu insulaire, car le nom de Samson y fut ajouté après coup (au 28 juillet) dans un manuscrit de Reims de la première moitié du IX^e siècle. Quentin, *Les martyrologes historiques*, 124. Cf. Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 98s.

¹⁰⁴ Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 293. Les étapes principales de ce parcours peuvent être commodément replacées dans l'espace grâce à la carte dressée par Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 293 ; carte reprise par Coumert, « Le peuplement de l'Armorique », 29.

¹⁰⁵ Un doute sur l'existence de Hénoc est aussi venu à l'esprit de Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 30.

cousin du saint, la date de sa composition peut glisser vers les VII^e-VIII^e siècles ; mais glisser jusqu'où ? Puis, où situer dans la durée l'intervention du remanieur ? La commande d'avoir à rédiger à Dol une Vie de s. Samson est survenue à un moment où on ne savait pas grand-chose de précis sur le saint. Quand et pourquoi une mise au net des traditions sur le saint patron a-t-elle paru nécessaire à l'évêque de Dol Tigernomagle ? L'examen du contenu de la Vie ancienne peut suggérer quelques pistes de réflexion.

Du point de vue du contenu

Comment distinguer les deux strates de la rédaction ? Il est indispensable d'avancer assez loin au VII^e siècle, le temps que deviennent familières à l'auteur de la *primigenia* des sources formelles qui ont commencé à circuler pendant ce siècle. Combien de temps a-t-il fallu pour que les écrits de Grégoire le Grand parviennent à sa connaissance ? Un tel instrument de datation reste forcément assez vague ; il n'est d'ailleurs pas très performant comme moyen de distinction entre deux étapes de rédaction, car les deux hagiographes hypothétiques sont susceptibles d'avoir remployé le langage de Grégoire. Si le mot *sacerdos* possède couramment le sens d'« évêque » à partir de 680 environ, comme l'observe Robert Godding¹⁰⁶, la *primigenia* pourrait être reportée après cette date. Mais l'argument ne s'impose pas absolument, car *sacerdos* possède déjà généralement ce sens dans la *Vita s. Germani Autisiodorensis* de Constance de Lyon à la fin du V^e siècle¹⁰⁷. Le fait que le contenu de la *VIS* paraisse en concordance avec le milieu décrit par Gildas pour la seconde moitié du VI^e siècle¹⁰⁸ ne suffit pas non plus à forcer une datation très ancienne.

Plus instructif est l'examen du rapport de la Vie de Samson avec la *Vita s. Paterni* (désormais *VP*) composée vers 600 par Venance Fortunat¹⁰⁹ ; il paraît bien établi, en effet, que les auteurs de la *primigenia* et de la *VIS* ont utilisé cette Vie de s. Pair. Bernard Merdrignac a dressé un tableau récapitulatif des points de contact entre les deux œuvres¹¹⁰ ; cette liste peut être allongée et précisée. Il suffira de citer ici en exemple l'apparition nocturne de trois évêques, qui annoncent au futur saint son accession à l'épiscopat (*VIS* I.43 = *VP* 16) ; des trois évêques vus en songe par s. Pair, l'un est nul autre que s. Melaine de Rennes.

Or Richard Sowerby a proposé récemment de considérer l'épisode Judual / Childebart comme une interpolation, aux chapitres 53 à 59 du premier livre, effectuée

¹⁰⁶ Godding, *Prêtres en Gaule*, 173. Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 319. Une équivalence entre *sacerdos* et *episcopus* peut également s'appliquer au sud du Pays de Galles à la fin du VII^e siècle, d'après Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 587-89. Sur l'ambiguïté du mot *sacerdos* dans ce contexte, voir aussi Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, 126s.

¹⁰⁷ *BHL* 3453. Gessel, « Germanus von Auxerre », 12.

¹⁰⁸ Position adoptée par Sharpe, « Gildas as a Father of the Church », 199s. Et encore, Sharpe, « Martyrs and local saints », 149. Huw Pryce se rallie à ce point de vue : « Conversions to christianity », 146.

¹⁰⁹ *BHL* 6477. Voir dans le présent volume la communication que lui a consacrée Caroline Brett ; à l'influence formelle de la *Vita Paterni*, elle ajoute la possibilité d'une influence typologique. Il est improbable que l'hagiographe samsonien se soit inspiré ici de la *Vita s. Albini* de Fortunat (*BHL* 234), contrairement à ce que nous avons jadis écrit : « Recherche et identification des sources », 122.

¹¹⁰ Merdrignac, « La première Vie de saint Samson », 285-88. Une liste de rapprochements avait déjà été dressée par Fawtier, « Saint Samson, abbé de Dol », 164s.

à Dol vers 700¹¹¹ ; cette addition serait assez ancienne, car l'histoire de Judual est présente dans la table des chapitres (art.41). Pour avancer dans la discussion, il faut ajouter à ce segment la première moitié du chapitre 60 ; en effet, au chapitre 60, Samson élimine définitivement un serpent qu'il avait d'abord affronté une première fois au chapitre 58. Le début du chapitre 60 serait incompréhensible sans le chapitre 58¹¹². Disons donc la séquence 53-60, soit une portion substantielle de texte : interpolation ou pas ? La possibilité d'une rencontre entre Samson et Childebert I^{er} (511-558) est chronologiquement possible ; mais au concile de Paris en 562, si Samson a rencontré un roi franc, ce serait plutôt Caribert. Si ce passage a été ajouté après coup par un tiers, il faut lui accorder un grand talent d'imitateur, car il a réussi à imiter merveilleusement bien le style et le vocabulaire du reste de la Vie ancienne¹¹³. Un tel mimétisme de l'*usus scribendi* du texte principal, c'est beaucoup demander, à notre avis ; aussi, nous avons préféré expliquer par une dépendance à l'égard de Fortunat l'introduction de Childebert dans la Vie de s. Samson¹¹⁴ ; la VP a fourni un cadre narratif pour raconter l'histoire de Judual qui circulait chez les Bretons. Dans ces conditions, il ne faut pas surestimer l'importance du rôle que Childebert aurait joué dans la consolidation d'une organisation diocésaine en Bretagne¹¹⁵.

D'où vient l'idée de nouer des relations entre Samson et Childebert ? De tels contacts sont impossibles à confirmer par des témoignages indépendants ; nous savons par ailleurs que les relations entre Francs et Bretons se sont dégradées sérieusement à partir des années 560¹¹⁶. Le rédacteur disposait-il de renseignements que nous ignorons ? Avons-nous ici une représentation stylisée d'une tradition relative à Judual qui circulait oralement chez les Bretons ? Un écho déformé du séjour d'un prince breton à Paris comme otage, garant de paix entre les Francs et les Bretons¹¹⁷ ? Mais pourquoi Childebert ? Comme nous l'avons déjà suggéré en 2009, nous voyons ici une transposition du rôle de Childebert auprès de s. Pair, au bénéfice de s. Samson ; dans la Vie de s. Pair comme dans celle de s. Samson, nous avons en effet un déplacement du saint auprès de la cour du roi (Paris est nommé dans la Vie de s. Pair, mais pas dans celle de s. Samson), une guérison de possédé à l'arrivée au palais royal, un refus initial de Childebert de recevoir le saint, suivi d'une acceptation de ses requêtes. Dès lors,

¹¹¹ Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 25-28 et 31. C'était déjà l'idée de la Borderie, « Autre Vie de saint Malo », 308-9.

¹¹² La solidarité du chapitre 60 avec le segment des chapitres 53-59 a été bien vue par Garault, « Écriture, histoire et identité », I.105s.

¹¹³ Un seul exemple suffira à l'illustrer : « ingens, electe Dei, habemus mentis scrupulum » (« élu de Dieu, nous avons un grand souci dans notre esprit ») en I.58 = « sancte, scrupulum ingens habemus mentis » (« ô saint, nous avons un grand souci à l'esprit ») en I.50, dans un même contexte d'élimination d'un serpent malfaisant.

¹¹⁴ Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 316. Scepticisme sur l'historicité des rapports entre Samson et Childebert chez Dumville, « On the dating », 212. Le fait que la présence de Childebert dans la Vie ancienne de s. Samson se soit ensuite répercutée dans d'autres Vies de saints bretons à partir de ce texte fondateur ne suffit pas à garantir la véracité de cette donnée ; *contra* : Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 47s., 123, 261s. et 356.

¹¹⁵ Idée mise de l'avant par Merdrignac & Plouchart, « La fondation des évêchés bretons », 146s.

¹¹⁶ Voir sur ce point Chédeville, « Francs et Bretons » (un peu trop confiant dans l'hagiographie bretonne ancienne comme témoin d'histoire mérovingienne, à notre avis). À compléter par Pietri, « Grégoire de Tours et les Bretons ».

¹¹⁷ Saint Ouen raconte comment saint Éloi négocia ce genre d'arrangement au nom du roi Dagobert, en 636×637 : « Brittanorum principem adiit, causas pacti indicavit, pacis obsidem recepit » (*Vita s. Eligii*, I.13 ; BHL 2474). Si Judual fut effectivement otage à Paris, son cas pourrait s'ajouter au dossier rassemblé par Kosto, *Hostages in the Middle Ages*.

il devient moins urgent de chercher à savoir si l'épouse (anonyme) de Childebert a vraiment joué un rôle négatif ; une autre source utilisée pour la *Vita* de Samson a pu en fournir l'inspiration, comme par exemple les écrits de Sulpice Sévère sur s. Martin de Tours, certainement très familiers à l'auteur. En effet, les *Dialogues* de Sulpice mettent en scène l'hostilité de l'épouse arienne du comte Valentinien, qui cherche à dresser son mari contre s. Martin de Tours¹¹⁸. La possibilité de voir une portée juridique dans l'accord entre Samson et Childebert paraît une perspective passablement éloignée¹¹⁹ ; il n'est pas davantage nécessaire de voir dans Childebert une récupération déformée du rôle historique de Dagobert, qui a vraiment entretenu des relations avec les Bretons (mais au VII^e siècle, pas au VI^e)¹²⁰.

Pair et Samson se connaissaient personnellement, puisqu'ils ont cosigné les actes du concile de Paris en 562. Leur *Vita* respective ignore cette rencontre ; mais les Bretons avaient des raisons de s'intéresser à la *VP*, car Fortunat inclut la *civitas* de Rennes dans le champ d'apostolat de Pair (*VP* 10, 33)¹²¹ et relate un miracle *post mortem* au bénéfice d'une muette venue de Rennes (*VP* 17, 49). La Vie de s. Pair a donc pu circuler assez tôt en Bretagne armoricaine. Elle était certainement connue au IX^e siècle, car le diacre Bili d'Alet l'a remployée vers 870 dans sa grande Vie de s. Malo¹²² ; mais jusqu'où peut-on remonter ? Ici encore, il est difficile de s'appuyer sur ce trait avéré d'intertextualité pour en tirer une datation précise ou évaluer la distance qui sépare la *primigenia* de sa réécriture par un Dolois. Il est néanmoins pratiquement impossible que cette œuvre de Fortunat soit parvenue dans les Cornouailles dès le début du VII^e siècle, date assignée par R. Sowerby pour la première recension de la *VIS*¹²³ ; la circulation médiévale de la *VP* est faible en effet, même sur le continent¹²⁴. Hénoc (ou celui qu'il représente) a dû travailler sur le continent et non pas dans un monastère inconnu des Cornouailles, comme le propose R. Sowerby (page 28).

À défaut de pouvoir mieux dater la *primigenia*, il est cependant possible d'être un peu plus précis pour son remaniement. Pour des raisons de forme d'abord ; mais peut-être aussi pour des raisons de fond. Voyons, dans un premier temps, pourquoi la

¹¹⁸ *Gallus* 2, 5. Rapprochement déjà suggéré dans Poulin, « Hagiographie et politique », 25, note c.

¹¹⁹ Malgré Quaghebeur, « Alain Barbe-Torte », 151 ; une confusion s'y est introduite entre le *portus* de Dol (en l.52) et le monastère de Pental (en l.59). Bruno Dumézil voit dans le règne de Childebert un moment décisif dans la christianisation des Gaules, mais n'utilise pas le témoignage de la *VIS* : « La royauté franque ». I. Wood incline à accepter l'historicité d'un rôle de Samson dans la vie politique du monde franc : « Britain and the Continent », 17s. Mais Samson est absent de l'étude de Moore, *A Sacred Kingdom*.

¹²⁰ C'est Sowerby qui introduit Dagobert dans la discussion ; « The Lives of St Samson », 17-19 et 31.

¹²¹ Bourges, « La *Vita Paterni* ». Nancy Gauthier se demande s'il faut voir dans cette extension géographique de la zone d'action de s. Pair un simple « effet d'amplification rhétorique » : « Coutances », 95.

¹²² *BHL* 5116 a et b. Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, s. v. Il faut ensuite attendre le X^e siècle pour voir se croiser à nouveau les destins de Pair et de Samson : leurs reliques furent réunies au moment de la fuite jusqu'à Paris devant les vikings, dans les années 920. Cette association s'est ensuite traduite par une messe propre commune dans un sacramentaire célèbre du X^e siècle : Orchard (éd.), *The Sacramentary of Ratoldus*, xxixs. et lxxxviii. Un tel développement est à mettre en lien avec le mouvement plus large de déplacement de reliques bretonnes jusqu'au roi Aethelstan († 939) : Foot, *Aethelstan*, 191.

¹²³ Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 30.

¹²⁴ Sur la dizaine de manuscrits médiévaux subsistants, il n'en reste que deux antérieurs à l'an mil, tous les deux carolingiens (autour de 800) : Wien, ÖNB, Clp 420 et Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Section Médecine H 55. Bède a bien connu les *Carmina* de Fortunat et utilisé une fois sa *Vita s. Martini*, mais pas sa *VP* ; références chez Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 225.

forme du texte empêche de remonter plus haut que le VIII^e siècle tardif. Le remanieur ne travaillait pas avant le VIII^e siècle, parce qu'il a utilisé deux sources d'influence formelle d'origine continentale qui ne circulaient pas avant le VIII^e siècle : Julien Pomère et un Pseudo-Bède le Vénérable.

Le *De vita contemplativa*, composé par Pomère au début du VI^e siècle, semble avoir été redécouvert au VIII^e siècle, date de ses manuscrits les plus anciens¹²⁵. Bède le Vénérable ignorait Pomère au début du VIII^e siècle, malgré la qualité relative des ressources documentaires à sa disposition¹²⁶ ; le « pattern of availability » du *De vita contemplativa* ne plaide pas en faveur d'une circulation notable de cette œuvre avant le milieu du VIII^e siècle. Dans une lettre de 747 à Cudbert de Cantorbéry, s. Boniface cite Pomère, mais sous la simple annonce « ut quidam sapientium dicit »¹²⁷ ; il a dû le découvrir sur le continent, car le *De vita contemplativa* semble inconnu en Angleterre et en Irlande avant l'an mil¹²⁸. Dans sa *Regula canonicorum*, Chrodegang de Metz cite le *De vita contemplativa*, bien qu'il l'ait connu sous le nom de Prosper d'Aquitaine († ca 445)¹²⁹. Alcuin et Paulin d'Aquilée connaissaient Pomère à la fin du VIII^e siècle, mais Alcuin a dû le découvrir sur le continent lui aussi¹³⁰. Defensor de Ligugé a utilisé Pomère (parfois sous le nom d'Ambroise) ; mais la date de sa compilation appelée *Liber scintillarum* est incertaine¹³¹ ; de toute façon, ni ce florilège, ni les auteurs mentionnés ci-dessus n'ont servi d'intermédiaire entre Pomère et la Vie de s. Samson pour la citation heureusement reconnue par Pierre Flobert (en II.4). Cet emprunt à Pomère III.12.1 s'avance lui aussi masqué par l'insérend « quidam sapiens dicit » (« un certain sage dit »), comme dans la lettre de s. Boniface mentionnée ci-dessus. L'hagiographe de s. Samson a dû connaître le *De vita contemplativa* directement, et non par l'intermédiaire d'une citation partielle rencontrée ailleurs ; en effet, il précise que son prélèvement provient d'un sermon sur le Jugement dernier (« de die iudicii sermonem ») [« un sermon sur le jour du Jugement »], en écho au titre du chapitre 12, livre III, chez Pomère (« De futuro

¹²⁵ Laistner a recensé une centaine de manuscrits médiévaux : « The influence ». Mais il faut lui ajouter les témoins supplémentaires énumérés par Dekkers & Gaar, *Clavis Patrum latinorum* (désormais *CPL*), n° 998.

¹²⁶ Selon l'évaluation de Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 127 et son inventaire détaillé des pages 191-228, confirmé par Love, « The library of the Venerable Bede », 606-32. Mais il est vrai que la pénurie de témoins survivants complique l'évaluation de la situation des bibliothèques dans les régions celtiques de la *Britannia* avant l'an mil : Gameson, « From Vindolanda to Domesday », 6s.

¹²⁷ Boniface, Ep. 78 (éd. Tangl, 164-5). Hahn, « Die angeblichen Predigten des Bonifaz », 597s. Schüling, « Die Handbibliothek des Bonifatius », 322s. et 329.

¹²⁸ Bieler, « La transmission des Pères latins », 75-84. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 39, 123 et 318. Il semble bien exclu que Pomère soit parvenu jusqu'au Dolois par des voies insulaires : Devisse, « L'influence de Julien Pomère », 288. Pomère ne figure pas parmi les sources d'influence répertoriées dans la base de données des *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* (<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk>). Il ne se trouvait pas non plus dans la bibliothèque du monastère d'Iona à la fin du VII^e siècle : O'Loughlin, « Monasteries and manuscripts ». Et encore O'Loughlin, « The library of Iona ».

¹²⁹ Références chez Claussen, *The Reform of the Frankish Church*, 192-95.

¹³⁰ Pomère ne figure pas parmi les sources d'Alcuin dans les deux œuvres qu'il a peut-être rédigées en Angleterre : son poème *Versus de patribus* et son collectaneum *De laude Dei*. Références chez Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 228-33.

¹³¹ *CPL*, n° 1302. L'argumentation de Felice Lifshitz, qui en reporte la compilation au deuxième versant du VIII^e siècle, n'est pas encore concluante : « Demonstrating Gun(t)za », 85 et 95. David Ganz s'interroge sur les liens possibles du *Liber scintillarum* avec un florilège transmis par un manuscrit daté du premier tiers du VIII^e siècle (London, BL Harley 5041 ; Lowe (éd.), *Codices*, II.202) : « Fragmentierung von patristischen Texten », 155s.

judicio vel aeternitati »). Cette citation ne peut pas avoir été relayée par un florilège comme les *Testimonia divinae scripturae* – une compilation espagnole du début du VII^e siècle, allongée ensuite en Gaule au VII^e siècle (premier tiers ?) ; en effet, ses 43 points de contacts répertoriés avec Pomère ne contiennent pas le passage requis¹³². Rien n'indique que les Bretons continentaux – et encore moins insulaires – aient été à l'avant-garde de la redécouverte de cette œuvre qui connaîtra une heure de gloire à la première moitié du IX^e siècle¹³³.

Tableau 3.4. Remploi d'une homélie de Pseudo-Bède dans la Vie ancienne de s. Samson de Dol

GRÉGOIRE le GRAND, <i>Homiliae in Evangelia</i> II.26.10 « Quid prodest interesse festis hominum, si deesse contingat festis angelorum ? »
Pseudo-BÈDE, <i>Homiliae</i> III.71 « Quid prodest interesse festis hominum, si deesse contingat festis angelorum ? »
Pseudo-BÈDE, <i>Homiliae</i> III.94 « Unde Scriptura dicit : 'Nihil prodest interesse festis hominum, si deesse contingat festis angelorum.' »
Vie ancienne de s. Samson, II.5 « Ceterum ut Scriptura dicit : 'Nihil prodest interesse festis hominum, si deesse contingat festis angelorum.' »
Vie ancienne de s. Samson, II.16 (écho) « ut qui interesse meruistis in terris festis sanctorum hominum, interesse etiam mereamini ... in caelestibus festis angelorum »

Une deuxième source, d'importance majeure ici, se rencontre dans un sermon d'un Pseudo-Bède le Vénérable, médiatisant Grégoire le Grand. L'existence de cet emprunt à Pseudo-Bède paraît certaine dans la partie de la Vie de s. Samson ajoutée par le remanieur (en II.5), même si elle n'a pas été reconnue comme telle par le dernier éditeur¹³⁴ ; cette citation revient ensuite sous forme d'écho dans le dernier chapitre de la *VIS* (II.16)¹³⁵. L'hagiographe croyait citer l'Écriture Sainte, telle que

¹³² Lehner (éd.), *Florilegia*, 148s. L'attribution des *Testimonia* (CPL 385) à s. Éloi demeure une hypothèse aux yeux de Lehner (page 50) ; hypothèse accueillie favorablement par Gabriel Silagi dans son compte rendu de l'édition de Lehner : *Deutsches Archiv* 46 (1990) 617. Sivo mentionne cette possibilité, mais sans l'endosser complètement : « Eligius », 211. Mary A. et Richard H. Rouse sont mieux disposés à l'accepter : « Eloi's books », 184s.

¹³³ Particulièrement entre 810 et 850, selon Devisse, « L'influence de Julien Pomère », 287. Et plus récemment Timmermann, « Sharers in the contemplative virtue ».

¹³⁴ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 94, n.108 et 247, n.3, voit un emprunt direct à Grégoire, mais retient une influence du milieu de Bède. Machielsens (éd.), *Clavis patristica pseudepigraphorum*, I.n° 4067 : « De sancto Petro et Paulo ». Devant la présence de cette citation dans l'homélaire de Pseudo-Bède III.71 (« Sermo de natale omnium sanctorum »), Réginald Grégoire s'interroge sur une attribution possible à Héliachar de St-Riquier († 833×844) : *Homéliaires liturgiques médiévaux*, 67s.

¹³⁵ Des tournures apparentées apparaissent encore ailleurs – dans le livre II seulement : en II.4 (« quid enim prodest, si ... »), en II.5 (« quid prodest, ut dixi, si ... », renvoyant à II.4), en II.6 (« nihil prodesse »), et en II.11 (« qui his festivitibus comperte desiderat interesse » [« celui qui désire participer à ces festivités en connaissance de cause »]).

remployée par Bède ; il ignorait que la source véritable se trouve dans les *Homélies sur les Évangiles* de Grégoire le Grand¹³⁶.

Cette interrogation de Grégoire se rencontre à deux reprises dans l'homélaire de Pseudo-Bède : une première fois telle quelle, sans identification de source¹³⁷ ; une seconde fois un peu plus loin, mais transformée de trois manières. Elle est alors précédée d'une insérande (fautive), le premier mot de la citation est modifié et la forme interrogative devient affirmative ; c'est sous cet avatar que l'hagiographe de s. Samson l'a empruntée¹³⁸. Mais la date de compilation de cet homélaire pseudépigraphique pose problème. Henri Barré place son origine en Bavière au début du IX^e siècle ; c'est à la fois trop loin à l'est et un peu trop tard pour nos besoins¹³⁹. Faut-il lui supposer un ancêtre un peu plus ancien et plus occidental ... ? Combien de temps faut-il ensuite compter, avant qu'il parvienne à la connaissance d'un hagiographe dolois ... ? Cette dépendance formelle à l'égard de Pseudo-Bède permet de rajeunir légèrement la mise au point finale de la Vie ancienne, par rapport à la chronologie retenue par le dernier éditeur, sur la base d'une dépendance supposée envers le vrai Bède le Vénérable († 735)¹⁴⁰. Les parallèles textuels qu'il a entrevus avec Bède manquent quelque peu de force probante, comme l'a démontré R. Sowerby¹⁴¹.

Le remploi de cet énoncé de Grégoire le Grand s'est produit ailleurs au VIII^e siècle. Ainsi dans le *Florilegium Frisingense*, compilé en Bavière à l'époque de l'évêque Arbeo de Freising († 783)¹⁴². Ou encore dans l'Homélaire de Paul Diacre († 799)¹⁴³. Mais à chaque fois, la question rhétorique de Grégoire s'y trouve citée littéralement, sans modification ni indication d'origine (réelle ou supposée). Ces deux documents ne peuvent donc pas jouer un rôle d'intermédiaire entre Grégoire et l'hagiographe dolois, ni dépendre de Pseudo-Bède 3, 94 ou de la Vie ancienne. Pour écarter la candidature de Pseudo-Bède, il faudrait supposer que ce dernier et le Dolois dérivent séparément d'un ancêtre commun (inconnu) qui retouchait déjà Grégoire ;

¹³⁶ Il ne semble pas qu'il ait connu par ailleurs ces Homélies de Grégoire ; nous ne retenons pas le syntagme *humanis obtutibus* (en II.6) comme emprunt formel aux *Homelie in Evangelia*, II.32.7, malgré Flobert, « La Vie ancienne de saint Samson », 186 (réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 630s.) et Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 94 et 272.

¹³⁷ Machielsen (éd.), *Clavis patristica pseudepigraphorum*, I.n° 4046 ; Migne (éd.), *Patrologia Latina*, 94.455B. C'est également sous cette forme qu'elle apparaît dans un sermon pour la Toussaint daté du deuxième quart du IX^e siècle (plutôt au début de cette période) par Cross, « *Legimus in ecclesiasticis historiis* », 127s. et 135. Parallèlement, Robert Weber a passé en revue diverses attributions hypothétiques : « Les sermons d'Ambroise Autpert », 326s.

¹³⁸ Machielsen (éd.), *Clavis patristica pseudepigraphorum*, I.n° 4067 ; Migne (éd.), *Patrologia Latina*, 94.497D.

¹³⁹ Les manuscrits les plus anciens sont du IX^e siècle. Barré, *Les homéliaires carolingiens*, 9s. Sa position est partagée par Lemarié, « Le sermon 34 de Chromace », 121, n.1. Et par T.N. Hall, « The early medieval sermon », 223.

¹⁴⁰ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 98s., 186, n.2, 242, n.2, 251, n.3, et 272, peut-être sur la lancée de Guillotel, « Les origines du ressort », 43s., n.40. Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 110, en tirait argument pour adopter une date du « milieu du VIII^e siècle ou même un peu plus tard ».

¹⁴¹ Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 21. C'est aussi l'avis de L. Olson, dans sa recension de Nicholas Orme, *Cornwall and the Cross : Christianity, 500-1560*, dans *Journal of British Studies* 49.2 (2010) 448.

¹⁴² Lehner (éd.), *Florilegia*, xiii et n° 447, a reconnu la sentence citée de Grégoire.

¹⁴³ N° 135 ; Migne (éd.), *Patrologia Latina*, 95.1337A ; mais il n'est pas certain que ce sermon pour la fête de s. Thomas – entièrement emprunté à Grégoire le Grand – fasse partie de la version primitive de cet homélaire influent, souvent interpolé après coup : Hall, « The early medieval sermon », 222.

ou supposer que la triple modification de la citation de Grégoire est survenue, à l'identique, à deux reprises indépendantes (à Dol et chez Pseudo-Bède) ou dans leur modèle respectif. Comme il est très improbable que Pseudo-Bède dépende ici de la *VIS*, la solution la plus économique reste de considérer que c'est le biographe de s. Samson qui emprunte à Pseudo-Bède.

La Vie ancienne ne peut sans doute pas être postérieure au VIII^e siècle, si l'on en croit l'état de la langue, apparemment antérieure aux effets de la rénovation scolaire carolingienne. Toutefois, une datation sur des critères purement linguistiques ne peut pas être concluante sur cette seule base ; si les œuvres hagiographiques d'Alcuin avaient été complètement anonymes, par exemple, leur langue aurait peut-être suggéré aux chercheurs d'aujourd'hui une datation plus ancienne qu'il ne convient¹⁴⁴. De même l'absence d'emprunts à des auteurs profanes dans la Vie de s. Samson¹⁴⁵ crée un fort contraste avec le mode d'écriture des hagiographes de Redon ou surtout de Landévennec au IX^e siècle. Mais la grande Vie de s. Malo par Bili (*BHL* 5116a et b) en est elle aussi complètement dépourvue, vers 870 ; un tel régime d'intertextualité ne peut donc pas à lui seul contraindre à adopter une datation ancienne. La plus grande partie du récit se déroule assurément avant le passage de Samson sur le continent (jusqu'au chapitre 52 du premier livre) ; mais sa *Vita* n'est pas pour autant un produit culturel hybride, où s'associeraient des influences formelles insulaires et continentales. L'absence d'influences d'auteurs insulaires, comme Gildas ou Bède, achève de convaincre du caractère continental de la rédaction de la *VIS*. Un demi-siècle plus tard environ, la Vie ancienne de s. Samson était déjà connue en Normandie, car elle fut utilisée avant 851 par la Vie de s. Germer de Fly¹⁴⁶.

À défaut de critère décisif de datation par la forme du texte, le fond du dossier peut-il aider à justifier de retenir la fin du VIII^e siècle ? Qu'est-ce qui a pu pousser les Dolois à vouloir écrire ou réécrire la Vie de s. Samson à ce moment particulier ? À quel moment l'évêque Tigernomagle a-t-il pu sentir le besoin de commander une (re)mise en chantier de la *VIS* – et un voyage d'enquête outre-Manche ? Depuis le milieu du VIII^e siècle, la pression franque est allée croissante sur la Bretagne armoricaine, pour l'amener à s'aligner sur le modèle institutionnel dominant¹⁴⁷. Cette pression n'est pas que politique ou militaire ; elle concerne aussi l'organisation ecclésiastique, comme l'illustre à la perfection l'ordre donné par Louis le Pieux en 818 à l'abbé Matmonoc de Landévennec d'avoir à faire entrer le monachisme breton

¹⁴⁴ Comme l'a observé Goulet, « Introduction », 21. Même au premier tiers du IX^e siècle, l'écart entre les cultures mérovingienne et carolingienne ne s'impose pas encore partout, comme l'a constaté Philippe Bernard à St-Riquier : « L'épanouissement d'une culture », 835.

¹⁴⁵ Nous ne retenons pas les rapprochements avec Salluste présentés par Flobert (éd.). *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 145, n.2, comme des emprunts formels.

¹⁴⁶ *Vita I^a s. Geremari*, 11-12 (*BHL* 3441). Il est moins certain qu'elle ait influencé la Vie de s. Marcouf, *Vita A* (*BHL* 5267 ; IX^e s.), chapitres 13-16 ; hypothèse proposée par Flobert, « Saint Marcouf », 41, n.7 (réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 681, n.7).

¹⁴⁷ Jones, « Brittany and Wales », 31. Plus encore, c'est le moment où s'amorce le mouvement de régularisation de l'institution métropolitaine : capitulaire de Herstal de 779, art.1 (éd. Boretius, 47). Pour l'interprétation de ce passage, voir Pangerl, *Die Metropolitanverfassung*, 26-28. La restauration effective du statut métropolitain de Tours n'est cependant documentée qu'au début du IX^e siècle (entre 804 et 811) : *ibid.*, 80. Et encore, Pangerl, « Die Metropolitanverfassung », 157.

dans les cadres de la Règle bénédictine¹⁴⁸. Symétriquement, la même orientation a dû être prise pour l'organisation diocésaine : Hubert Guillotel situe justement la transformation de Dol en diocèse territorial autour de l'an 800¹⁴⁹. Les évêques Leucher et Tigernomagle pourraient donc être des prélats de Dol à cette époque de transition ; leurs noms disparaissent pourtant de la *VIIIS* au milieu du IX^e siècle. Le nom de Leucher y est emporté par la suppression d'un miracle *post mortem* survenu à Dol(!) ; celui de Tigernomagle, par la suppression des deux préfaces de la Vie ancienne. Le souvenir de leur passage sur le siège épiscopal était-il déjà perdu à Dol ? Ou les considérait-on comme des évêques trop récents pour jouer un rôle dans la vie d'un saint du VI^e siècle ? À moins qu'on n'ait pas osé les présenter comme des archevêques de Dol, quand Samson avait prétendument porté ce titre avant eux¹⁵⁰ ?

La solution proposée récemment par R. Sowerby soulève plusieurs questions. Si l'auteur de la Vie ancienne (à une interpolation près aux chapitres I.53 à 60) avait été un moine cornouaillais désireux de rehausser le prestige de son monastère, pourquoi parle-t-il si peu de cet établissement ? Il est plus disert à propos des monastères d'Eltutus (Llanilltud Fawr) et de Piro (Ynys Bŷr, maintenant Caldey Island). Le remanieur tient à faire savoir qu'il a visité ces deux derniers lieux de mémoire samsonienne (avec EGO !) ; mais il aurait méconnu la seule fondation monastique insulaire de Samson ? Comment un hagiographe primitif aurait-il pu avoir connaissance, vers 600, de miracles continentaux *post mortem* (en II.10 et 15) ? Comment pourrait-il enfin se réclamer d'une proximité de la dépouille mortelle du saint à Dol (en I.61) ? Il est possible, mais pas certain, que le monastère où se trouvait le *venerabilis senex* informateur du remanieur ait été fondé par Samson dans les Cornouailles (en I.50). Les lieu et date de rédaction proposés par R. Sowerby soulèvent finalement plus de problèmes qu'ils n'en résolvent.

L'hagiographe remanieur a connu personnellement l'évêque Tigernomagle : il lui adresse la parole à trois reprises (en Prol.1 et II.1 et 2). Or cet écrivain cite inconsciemment Grégoire le Grand, d'après une reformulation attribuée (à ses yeux) à l'Écriture sainte – en fait à un Pseudo-Bède. Combien de temps a-t-il fallu pour que Bède jouisse sur le continent d'un prestige tel qu'on ait l'idée de placer un homélaire sous son patronage¹⁵¹ ? Sans doute guère avant le milieu du VIII^e siècle. Combien de temps a-t-il fallu ensuite pour que cette compilation effectuée dans le monde franc parvienne à la connaissance d'un écrivain dolois ? On glisse vers la fin du VIII^e siècle ... Tigernomagle ne peut donc pas être le Tigermal mort en 707, comme le propose R. Sowerby¹⁵².

¹⁴⁸ Vers 870, ce grand moment de l'histoire de Landévennec est valorisé par l'insertion d'un extrait du diplôme (ou d'une lettre) de l'empereur dans la grande Vie de s. Guénolé (*BHL* 8957, en II.13) et dans la version abrégée de cette Vie destinée à l'évêque Jean d'Arezzo (*BHL* 8960, au ch.5).

¹⁴⁹ Guillotel, « Les origines du ressort », 63s. et 66. Poulin, « À propos du diocèse de Dol ».

¹⁵⁰ André Chédeville demeure perplexe devant ces absences : *La Bretagne des saints*, 148. A. Lunven les passe sous silence dans sa liste des évêques de Dol ; outre Samson, placé dans les années 556×573, le premier évêque assuré dans sa liste est ensuite Jean, pour les années 814×840 (*Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 373 ; voir aussi pp. 48s., n.73).

¹⁵¹ Des œuvres indûment attribuées à Bède ont commencé à circuler au VIII^e siècle, dès avant la rénovation carolingienne, comme l'a constaté Gorman, « The canon of Bede's works », 416. Aux VIII^e/IX^e siècles, la renommée de Bède s'est répandue plus vite sur le continent que dans son île natale, selon McKitterick, « Kulturelle Verbindungen », 143.

¹⁵² Voir plus haut, note 95.

La présence du mot *Romania* est-elle suffisante pour forcer une datation « mérovingienne » de la Vie de Samson ? C'était déjà l'avis d'Hubert Guillotel¹⁵³ ; T. Charles-Edwards en tire séparément la même conclusion, au motif de l'anachronisme que représenterait au VIII^e siècle ce vocable remplacé par *Francia* pour désigner le nord de la Gaule, Armorique exceptée¹⁵⁴. Mais il n'est pas nécessaire d'aller bien loin dans l'hagiographie carolingienne pour rencontrer le mot *Romania* appliqué à cette partie de la Gaule : ainsi dans la *Revelatio ecclesiae sancti Michaelis archangeli in Monte Tumba* : « in orientalibus Romaniae partibus » (« dans les parties orientales de la Romanie »)¹⁵⁵. Le mot *Romania* (ou son parent *Romanus*) apparaît quatre fois dans la *VIS* (Prol.2 ; I.60 et 61 ; II.11) ; en trois de ces occurrences, *Romania/Romanus* sont mis en opposition avec *Britannia/Britannus*¹⁵⁶. Ces derniers noms propres visent tantôt l'Armorique (Prol.2 ; I.59), tantôt le Pays de Galles (I.7, I.38, I.41), tantôt l'ensemble des terres bretonnes de part et d'autre de la Manche (en I.9, II.11 ; et I.5 ?). Le mot *Romania* sert à qualifier tantôt les pays francs, tantôt l'ensemble de l'Armorique et de la Neustrie (que le premier hagiographe de Samson appelle aussi *Europa*)¹⁵⁷. Une quatrième présence du mot *Romania* désigne clairement les pays francs, car elle sert à localiser le monastère de Pental à l'embouchure de la Seine (en I.60). La première et la dernière de ces apparitions du mot *Romania* sont à coup sûr attribuables au remanieur (Prol.2 et II.11) ; les deux autres occurrences (I.60 et 61) surviennent dans des chapitres courts, très probablement retouchés, sinon partiellement réécrits par le remanieur. De toute façon, *Britannia* et *Romania* sont utilisés ici comme termes géographiques, sans connotation ethnique, comme l'a bien vu Julia Smith¹⁵⁸. Cela étant, l'argument de la présence du mot *Romania* ne paraît pas d'un poids suffisant pour écarter la thèse d'une réécriture vers la fin du VIII^e siècle ; en effet, reporter au VII^e siècle la composition de l'ensemble de la Vie ancienne comme œuvre unitaire poserait des problèmes encore plus insurmontables.

Un paradoxe certain découle du fait que l'ascète Samson soit si peu campé dans une posture d'évêque de Dol ; tout au plus, une allusion au statut épiscopal de Samson à Dol apparaît peut-être en II.3, sous le nom d'« antistes noster »¹⁵⁹. P. Flobert traduit cette occurrence unique par « prêtre » au lieu d'« évêque »... Samson aurait pu être un évêque missionnaire, sans territoire d'action bien délimité ; mais il n'est

¹⁵³ Guillotel, « Les origines du ressort », 46. Discussion du sens du mot *Romania* dans la Vie ancienne par Merdrignac, « La Neustrie/Normandie », 39-41.

¹⁵⁴ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 189 et 238s. P. Flobert n'y voit qu'« une certaine saveur d'archaïsme » : « L'émergence de l'Europe historique », 253 (réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 563s.). La *VIIS* abandonne *Romania* pour *Francia*, mais pas à des passages symétriques de son hypotexte (*VIIS*, II.3, 12 et 20).

¹⁵⁵ *BHL* 5951, ch.1 ; première moitié du IX^e siècle. Ce vocable ne provient pas de la source principale du document, le *Liber de apparitione sancti Michaelis in Monte Gargano* (*BHL* 5948 ; Italie du Sud, début du VIII^e siècle).

¹⁵⁶ L'opposition entre *Romani* et *Britanni* (en II.11) se rencontre déjà dans les Actes du concile de Tours en 567 (canon 9), mais cela ne suffit pas à vieillir la *VIS*.

¹⁵⁷ Table des chapitres, articles 39 et 42 ; I.46/47 et I.52/53.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, « Confronting identities », 172.

¹⁵⁹ C'est aussi le titre qu'il reçoit dans une addition, ajoutée au deuxième quart du IX^e siècle à un exemplaire rémois (maintenant perdu) du Calendrier métrique d'York dressé au troisième quart du VIII^e siècle : « Antistes Samson felicitat alta petivit » (« l'évêque Samson s'est heureusement dirigé vers le ciel ») (au 28 juillet). Wilmart, « Un témoin anglo-saxon », 41, n.2 et 69.

guère représenté dans des activités d'évangélisation¹⁶⁰. Il est vrai que l'accession de Samson à l'épiscopat avant son passage sur le continent (en I.43/44) n'était pas davantage liée à un lieu ni à une affectation territoriale particulière. Le saint n'est pas davantage qualifié d'« episcopus Britannorum » (« évêque des Bretons »), comme le fut l'évêque Mansuetus au concile de Tours en 461. Avant la naissance du saint, un *librarius* insulaire¹⁶¹ annonce à sa mère qu'il jouera un rôle de premier plan auprès de la « gens Britannorum » (en I.5) ; mais quels Bretons ? Insulaires, continentaux, ou les deux ? Sous la plume du premier rédacteur, des expressions comme « pontifex summus » et « egregius sacerdos » (en I.9) ou « summus sacerdos » (en I.4, 5 et 43 [bis])¹⁶² portent sans doute un sens plus précis qu'il n'y paraît. Ces termes servent en effet dans l'hagiographie irlandaise du VII^e siècle à désigner un évêque de rang supérieur¹⁶³ ; en outre, un corps épiscopal hiérarchisé a peut-être existé dès le VII^e siècle dans le royaume de Dyfed, d'où Samson est originaire¹⁶⁴. Avant la traversée de la Manche, nous voyons Samson agir en tant qu'évêque quand il consacre des églises fondées par sa mère et sa tante (I.47)¹⁶⁵ et quand il élève son cousin Hénoc au rang de diacre (I.52). Une fois passé sur le continent, Samson s'affaire bien plus en Neustrie (la cour de Chilbert – mais Paris n'est pas nommé ; Pental) qu'en Armorique¹⁶⁶. La fin du chapitre I.52 décrit une zone d'activité largement découpée, mais dans des termes assez vagues (« per totam pene provinciam » [« dans presque tout le pays »]) qui ne trouvent pas vraiment de correspondance concrète dans le contenu de la Vie ancienne¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁰ À moins de compter comme telles l'interruption d'une cérémonie païenne dans les Cornouailles (en I.48/49 ; un calque de la *Vita s. Martini*, 12-13 par Sulpice Sévère) ou l'élimination d'une pratique païenne dans l'île de *Lesia* (en II.13 ; Guernesey?).

¹⁶¹ Ce *librarius* gallois (identifié comme *sacerdos* en I.6) serait-il l'équivalent du *scriba* irlandais du haut Moyen Âge, au sens de grand savant ? Cf. Richter, « The personnel of learning », 282.

¹⁶² Le syntagme « summus sacerdos » est aussi présent dans la Vie de s. Martin (26.5) par Sulpice Sévère, une œuvre dont l'influence sur la *VIS* est bien établie. Cf. Poulin, « Hagiographie et politique ».

¹⁶³ Picard, « *De principatu* », 13, ou Picard, « Pour une réévaluation », 143. Il n'y a pourtant pas apparence d'une influence directe sur la *VIS* de Muirchú, *Vita s. Patricii* 1, 9, 1 (*BHL* 6497 ; fin VII^e siècle) ou de Cogitosus, *Vita s. Brigidæ*, prol., 31 et 37 (*BHL* 1457 ; vers 650). Wendy Davies voit dans l'accession de Samson à l'épiscopat une simple distinction honorifique, sans responsabilité territoriale : *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, 126s. Et à nouveau, Davies, « The myth of the Celtic Church », 14s.

¹⁶⁴ C'est la thèse soutenue par Etchingham, « Bishopricks in Ireland », 23s. Dans le même sens, cf. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 587s., 593s. et 596-8. Mais traduire *sacerdos* par « évêque » ne s'impose pas forcément, comme le rappelle Alex Woolf, dans sa recension du dernier livre de Charles-Edwards (*English Historical Review* 129 [2014] 161s.). Les syntagmes « *cathedra episcopalis* » (« trône épiscopal ») (en I.44 de la *VIS*) et « summus sacerdos » se trouvent aussi dans la préface de *Vita s. Brigidæ* par Cogitosus (*BHL* 1457) ; mais ce n'est pas suffisant pour établir un lien de dépendance formelle. Cartographie des anciens royaumes gallois chez Davies, *Patterns of Power*, 33.

¹⁶⁵ Le rôle de Samson comme « *ecclesiarum fundator* » (« fondateur d'églises ») était déjà annoncé par l'abbé Eltut dès I.9.

¹⁶⁶ Samson a aussi transité par les îles « anglo-normandes », mais cet archipel fait partie de l'espace breton jusqu'au X^e siècle : Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 67, et Lunven, « Le pouvoir épiscopal », 126-8.

¹⁶⁷ I.52 : « multa que inde mirabilium opera seminans ac multa monasteria per totam pene provinciam fundans » (« il multiplia ensuite les miracles et fonda de nombreux monastères dans presque tout le pays »). C'est un passage que nous avons suspecté d'interpolation par le remanieur : Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 272s.

Karen Jankulak fait observer avec à-propos la faible place occupée par Dol dans la Vie ancienne¹⁶⁸ ; on aurait pu s'attendre à un traitement plus développé dans une œuvre composée – puis remaniée – à Dol. Cependant, il est remarquable de constater que l'unique fondation monastique de Samson avant sa traversée de la Manche n'est ni nommée ni localisée, alors que Dol et Pental sont clairement mis en place sur le continent. Les chapitres I.52 et I.61 mentionnent le nom du monastère de Dol – et là seulement ; ces précisions ont-elles été introduites par le remanieur, tout comme pour le nom de Pental en I.38 ? En tout cas, il n'est nulle part question d'un siège épiscopal à Dol du vivant de Samson. Il est possible que ce saint ait été évêque à Dol, mais pas forcément évêque de Dol au VI^e siècle ; cependant, le remanieur nomme deux évêques (Tigernomagle et Leucher) qui semblent bien être sur le siège de Dol. L'existence d'un diocèse de Dol dès le VII^e siècle nous paraît problématique.

Au concile de Paris en 562, la qualité épiscopale de Samson ne semble pas faire problème¹⁶⁹. Mais à la fin du VIII^e siècle, la stature épiscopale de Samson ne paraît pas s'imposer à tous. Deux authentiques de reliques de la seconde moitié du VIII^e siècle, retrouvés à Chelles, n'ajoutent aucune précision au nom du saint¹⁷⁰. Dans un exemplaire de Fontenelle du martyrologe hiéronymien, le nom de Samson apparaît en 772 comme abbé du monastère de Dol, sans plus¹⁷¹. Quelques années plus tard, Alcuin a composé une inscription pour un autel consacré à s. Samson (entre autres) à St-Vaast d'Arras¹⁷² ; il ne lui attribue aucune dignité particulière – s'il s'agit bien de notre Samson. Vers 865, Usuard introduit Samson comme évêque dans son martyrologe, mais en lien avec le monastère de Dol¹⁷³. Devant un tel profil de sainteté, il est loisible de penser que la Vie de Samson est sortie d'un milieu monastique plutôt qu'épiscopal ; d'où l'observation, en I.61 : « in Dolo monasterio ... apud nos habemus ». Mais il n'est jamais question de reliques du saint, mis à part une croix précieuse et un bâton qui lui ont appartenu¹⁷⁴.

¹⁶⁸ Jankulak, « The absent saint », 197s.

¹⁶⁹ Quand le concile de Tours de 567 légifère sur les conditions d'accès à l'épiscopat des Romains et des Bretons en Armorique (c.9), ce n'est probablement pas au statut épiscopal incertain d'un s. Samson que pensent les Pères du concile, mais plutôt aux troubles récents autour du siège de Vannes, tels que rapportés par Grégoire de Tours (*Histoires*, IV.4) ; ainsi chez Merdrignac & Plouchart, « La fondation des évêchés bretons », 148 et, séparément, chez Cantelli Berarducci, « Elezioni e consacrazioni », 24s.

¹⁷⁰ Atsma & Vezin (éd.), *Chartae Latinae antiquiores*, XVIII.n^{os} 114 et 136 (« sancti Samsoni ») ; Laporte, *Le trésor des saints de Chelles*, 121. Fleuriot, « Brittonica et Gallica », 194-97.

¹⁷¹ De Rossi & Duchesne (éd.), *Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, II.97 : « Dolo monasterio, sancti Samsonis abbatiss [depositio] » (« au monastère de Dol, [déposition] du saint abbé Samson »).

¹⁷² Jullien & Perelman, *Clavis des auteurs latins*, II.458, ALC 61.110.13 ; St-Vaast en possédait donc des reliques. Mais il ne faut sans doute pas trop demander à ces témoignages, car leur précision hiérarchique ou topographique n'est pas une priorité. Une dédicace d'autel suppose la présence de reliques, mais pas forcément la présence d'un texte, comme le constatent Philippart & Trigalet, « Légendes hagiographiques », 263.

¹⁷³ Martyrologe d'Usuard, au 28 juillet : « In Britannia minori, Dolo monasterio, sancti Samsonis episcopi et confessoris [depositio] » (« en petite Bretagne, au monastère de Dol, [déposition] de saint Samson, évêque et confesseur »). Dubois (éd.), *Le martyrologe d'Usuard*, 73 et 274s.

¹⁷⁴ En II.10 et 15 ; le bâton du saint est aussi mentionné en I.32, I.41 et II.12. Sur la faible présence des reliques dans l'hagiographie bretonne, cf. Smith, « Oral and written ». On peut ajouter le *baculus* de Samson à l'inventaire des bâtons de saints conservés comme reliques secondaires, dressé par Edwards, « Celtic saints », 252-55.

Conclusion

Si le personnage de Hénoc est une simple convention rhétorique, posé à la tête d'une chaîne imaginaire de transmission des renseignements, est-ce que les « litterae transmarinae » sont-elles aussi un document fantôme, un peu comme le « liber vetustissimus » dont Geoffroi de Monmouth prétendra se servir au XII^e siècle pour son *Historia regum Britanniae*¹⁷⁵ ? Si la version primitive ne fut pas composée par un contemporain du saint, que valent ses indications de sources (orales et écrites) ? Sur cette lancée, on pourrait douter de la réalité du voyage d'information outre-Manche, et pourquoi pas douter aussi de l'existence des évêques Leucher et Tigernomagle, bien oubliés à Dol au milieu du IX^e siècle. Car si la *primigenia* est une source inventée, et non pas trouvée, c'est toute la *Vita* qui serait tardive ; ce que Fawtier appelle « une supercherie littéraire »¹⁷⁶. Le voyage outre-Manche devient alors imaginaire, les signaux de réécriture sont en trompe-l'œil, les indications de sources (orales et écrites) fantaisistes et les différences apparentes de deux manières d'écrire s'expliquent par le hasard.

Nous nous refusons à admettre autant de cynisme de la part d'un hagiographe manipulateur ; nous nous arrêtons donc aux propositions suivantes :

- Hénoc n'est pas vraiment nécessaire comme personnage historique ; son rôle emblématique sert à donner une couleur familiale rassurante à la transmission des données sur le saint.
- Il a existé une version primitive de la Vie de s. Samson¹⁷⁷ ; cet état du texte – de la fin du VII^e siècle au plus tôt – est maintenant enchâssé dans une version augmentée, notre Vie dite ancienne. Il est donc légitime de compter la *VIS* comme une création pour une part antérieure à l'époque carolingienne¹⁷⁸. S'il n'est pas possible d'identifier de façon certaine ce qui appartient à la recension primitive, il est du moins possible de reconnaître à coup sûr au moins quelques-unes des additions ou retouches postérieures.

Le remanieur a vraiment circulé dans la contrée d'origine du saint, afin de recueillir des éléments d'information supplémentaires, sous forme orale et écrite¹⁷⁹.

Le résultat final a été compilé vers la fin du VIII^e siècle pour répondre à la demande de l'évêque Tigernomagle de Dol, successeur proche – sinon immédiat – de l'évêque Leucher¹⁸⁰.

Dans ces conditions, quelle histoire écrire à l'aide de la *VIS* ? Sans doute plus une histoire de l'époque des hagiographes que celle du saint ; en tout cas, un VI^e siècle insulaire et continental tel que reconstitué un siècle et demi après les événements et revisité à la fin du VIII^e siècle. Mais Ian Wood a eu raison d'insister sur la nécessité de distinguer authenticité du texte et exactitude de l'information dans la Vie de s.

¹⁷⁵ Bourgain, « Passeurs et médiateurs ».

¹⁷⁶ Fawtier (éd.), *La Vie de saint Samson*, 76.

¹⁷⁷ Flobert, « Les vicissitudes », 378, n.3 (réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 644, n.3), la considère comme un mythe, sans autre démonstration de sa part.

¹⁷⁸ Ainsi chez Heinzelmann, « L'hagiographie mérovingienne », 73.

¹⁷⁹ C'est aussi la position adoptée par Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ La récente Prosopographie de la Gaule joue de prudence en s'arrêtant à une date « antérieure au début du IX^e siècle » : Pietri & Heijmans, « Samson », 1701.

Samson¹⁸¹ ; même relativement tardive, elle porte certainement un témoignage utile pour documenter une histoire du Pays de Galles, de l'Armorique et plus largement de la Neustrie, à décoder avec précaution. Elle n'a pas encore livré tous ses secrets ; on ne peut pas s'en débarrasser comme d'un *Mönchsroman*, suivant l'avis de Walter Berschin¹⁸². Chose certaine, l'existence de deux étapes dans la rédaction de la Vie ancienne appelle une lecture différenciée de ces deux strates textuelles. Parmi les questions encore en suspens, plusieurs mériteraient à notre avis de retenir en priorité l'attention des chercheurs.

Par rapport à la forme du texte : est-ce qu'une étude de la langue permettrait de valider par une autre voie la thèse d'une rédaction en deux étapes ? Nous avons naguère essayé de distinguer deux couches rédactionnelles par la distinction entre deux manières d'écrire¹⁸³. Ian Wood est à bon droit sceptique sur la possibilité de dater une telle Vie (mérovingienne à ses yeux) par un argument strictement linguistique¹⁸⁴, là où P. Flobert croit pouvoir adopter la date du VIII^e siècle¹⁸⁵. La meilleure étude de la langue du texte est pour l'instant celle de Flobert¹⁸⁶. T. Charles-Edwards reconnaît dans des tournures comme « ille solus » (I.6, 44 et 50 ; II.8) ou « ipse solus » (Prol.2, I.8 et 45) (« lui seul »)¹⁸⁷ des traces d'influence de la langue bretonne sur le latin de la Vie ancienne ; mais ces traits se rencontrent chez l'un et l'autre rédacteur, à notre avis. Il faut en effet que la langue bretonne ait été familière à l'écrivain, pour qu'il fournisse un équivalent latin correct au nom breton de Viniavus (= *Lux*) en I.46 ; mais cette portion du texte est peut-être attribuable au remanieur dolois. La graphie apparemment archaïque de *Docco* (en I.45) ne suffit sans doute pas à vieillir le texte¹⁸⁸. Une approche sociolinguistique, apparentée à celle qu'a utilisée Rémy Verdo, aiderait peut-être à y voir plus clair¹⁸⁹. Est-ce qu'une étude quantitative, aidée par l'informatique, permettrait une critique d'attribution qui arrive à mieux distinguer les contributions de deux auteurs différents, comme on a essayé de le faire récemment pour la *Passio Perpetuae* ou pour l'hagiographie italienne¹⁹⁰ ?

Sur le fond, un moment du parcours historique de Samson appelle une étude plus poussée : c'est toute la question des rapports avec l'Irlande, une affaire qui déborde de beaucoup la seule *VIS*. Il est déjà curieux de noter que la rencontre de Samson avec des « peritissimi Scotti » (« Irlandais très savants ») (en I.37) est absente de la table des chapitres ; on y voit bien la présence de Samson en Irlande (art.33 de la

¹⁸¹ Wood, « Forgery », 384. C'était déjà la position de l'abbé Duine, comme le rappelle Loth, « La Vie la plus ancienne de saint Samson, abbé-évêque de Dol », 5 ; 37 de la réimpr.

¹⁸² Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*, II.231s.

¹⁸³ Poulin, « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson », 276-80.

¹⁸⁴ Wood, « Forgery », 373. Mais voir maintenant Goullet, « Langue des textes ».

¹⁸⁵ Flobert, « La Vie ancienne de saint Samson », 189 (ca 710) ; réimpr. dans Flobert, *Grammaire comparée*, 635. Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 110 (« milieu du VIII^e siècle ou même un peu plus tard »).

¹⁸⁶ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 63-84 et 277-92.

¹⁸⁷ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 625, à la suite de Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 67.

¹⁸⁸ Olson, « The date of the First Life », 179s., invoquant sur ce point la caution d'Oliver Padel.

¹⁸⁹ Verdo, « Approche sociolinguistique ».

¹⁹⁰ Verkerk, « Critique d'attribution ». Philippart de Foy & D'Angelo, « L'hagiographie latine de l'Ombrie ». Un premier essai d'identification de deux manières d'écrire la Vie ancienne de s. Samson se trouve dans notre article « La 'Vie ancienne' de saint Samson ».

table), mais pas comment et pourquoi il a été amené à s'y rendre¹⁹¹. Est-ce que cet épisode constitue vraiment un chapitre de l'histoire des rapports entre l'Irlande et le Pays de Galles dans le domaine ecclésiastique¹⁹² ? Et que dire de l'abbé irlandais qui suit Samson sur le continent et va terminer pieusement ses jours (comme abbé ?) à Pental (en I.38) ? Samson place ensuite son oncle Umbraphel à la tête du monastère qui lui a été donné en Irlande (en I.40). Est-ce que la rencontre avec Viniavus en I.46 – un saint d'origine irlandaise, d'après P. O'Riain – fait partie de la même histoire ? Le passage consacré au monastère de Docco se trouvait-il déjà dans la *primigenia*, ou s'il fut ajouté par le remanieur, informé à l'occasion de son passage dans les Cornouailles ? Le choix d'établir un ermitage dans un *castellum* près de la Severn (en I.40 et 42) reflète-t-il une influence de la faveur des sites fortifiés dans le monachisme irlandais¹⁹³ ? Le séjour de Samson en Irlande avant de partir pérégriner sur le continent appartient-il à un mouvement véritablement historique plus large¹⁹⁴ – comme pour s. Willibrord, par exemple¹⁹⁵ – ou faut-il y voir un simple lieu commun hagiographique ? L'attribution de relations de saints bretons avec l'Irlande a en effet fini par devenir un cliché, comme l'a constaté Karen Jankulak¹⁹⁶. Le déplacement de Samson en Irlande correspond pourtant bien à une époque de contacts personnels soutenus entre l'Irlande et le Pays de Galles, comme le démontre T. Charles-Edwards¹⁹⁷ ; mais dans le cas de Samson, c'est à l'Irlande qu'est attribué un pouvoir d'attraction, plutôt qu'un rayonnement du Pays de Galles. On ne peut malheureusement pas compter, pour éclairer cette histoire, avec une circulation de la Vie ancienne de Samson dans l'ouest de la Bretagne insulaire ou en Irlande, car elle est absente de l'histoire des bibliothèques anciennes de ces contrées celtiques¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹¹ Pádraig O'Riain exprime des doutes sur cet épisode irlandais à une date aussi ancienne que l'époque de la vie de s. Samson, et même au VII^e siècle, date acceptée par plusieurs pour la rédaction de sa première *Vita* : « Samson alias San(c)tán? » ; voir aussi sa recension de Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, dans *Peritia* 3 (1984) 569. Sur l'historicité du voyage en Irlande, jugement réservé de Wooding, *Communication and Commerce*, 62.

¹⁹² Dumville, « British missionary activity », 141-44. Charles Thomas a qualifié cet épisode d'addition tardive, mais sans raison suffisante : *And Shall these Mute Stones Speak?*, 228s. et 235. Michael Herity ne traite pas le cas de s. Samson dans : « Les premiers ermitages ». Non plus que T.M. Charles-Edwards dans « Britons in Ireland ». Une forte présence irlandaise dans le sud du Pays de Galles est cependant assurée à l'époque de s. Samson : Yorke, « Britain and Ireland », 46.

¹⁹³ Ainsi chez Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 107s. Ahronson & Charles-Edwards, « *Prehistoric Annals* ». P. Flobert neutralise « castellum admodum delicatum » en le traduisant par « hauteur très agréable ».

¹⁹⁴ Plusieurs exemples donnés par Sharpe, « Martyrs and local saints », 84s. Et Sharpe, « Books from Ireland », 19. Sur le volet continental des rapports entre Bretons et Irlandais, cf. Merdrignac, « Bretons et Irlandais ».

¹⁹⁵ Richter, « England and Ireland », 45 et 48. Ces deux saints ont quitté l'Irlande pour aller œuvrer sur le continent, mais cela ne suffit pas à faire d'eux des *peregrini* « à la mode irlandaise » – si une telle chose existe, ce que conteste Hayes-Healy, « 'Irish Pilgrimage' ».

¹⁹⁶ Jankulak, « Carantoc *alias* Cairnech? », 116.

¹⁹⁷ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 185-87. Ou encore Yorke, « Britain and Ireland », 46. Au dossier du pouvoir d'attraction de l'Irlande, joindre le cas d'un Franc qui est peut-être allé s'y former dans la première moitié du VII^e siècle : Hammer, « 'Holy Entrepreneur' ». Michael Richter est réservé devant la possibilité que le cercle d'Illtud ait pu étendre l'influence monastique galloise jusqu'en Irlande au VI^e siècle : *Irland im Mittelalter*, 50.

¹⁹⁸ O'Neill, « Celtic Britain ». Guère plus utile, la diffusion de la renommée de Samson telle que cartographiée par Bowen, « The travels », 27. Critique de sa méthode et de ses résultats par Pearce, « Sainly cults », 270.

Du point de vue de la dimension épiscopale du personnage de Samson, qu'est-ce qui lui a valu sa position prééminente dans la mémoire bretonne à partir du IX^e siècle ? Est-ce que la seule existence de sa Vie ancienne suffit à l'expliquer, par sa mention répétée de « *summus sacerdos / pontifex* » (I.4, 5, 9, 43)¹⁹⁹ ? Qui a pris en charge la promotion de son culte ? Est-ce qu'un clan breton l'a choisi comme *patronus peculiaris* ? Nous ne connaissons pas de prince breton qui l'ait adopté comme protecteur de sa lignée. Nominoé († 851), par exemple, s'est intéressé à Redon et à s. Conwoion, pas spécialement à s. Samson à notre connaissance ; son rôle dans la fondation d'un monastère à Léhon n'est attesté que par un récit de translation de s. Magloire (BHL 5142 ; vers 860). Le roi Salomon († 874) a ensuite choisi s. Maixent, un saint poitevin, comme patron de l'église destinée à lui servir d'hypogée royal (et dynastique ?) à Maxent (département d'Ille-et-Vilaine)²⁰⁰. Quelles Vies de saints offre-t-il en cadeau aux moines de Redon réfugiés à Plélan-le-Grand (département d'Ille-et-Vilaine) en 869 ? Les Vies de s. Léger et de s. Maixent, pas de s. Samson, ni même d'aucun autre saint breton²⁰¹. À cette date, le saint patron de Dol fait pourtant bien l'objet de prétentions métropolitaines. Où est la grande famille – ou le prélat entreprenant – qui aurait cherché à instrumentaliser la renommée de Samson pour cautionner ou renforcer ses ambitions ? Comment Samson en est-il venu à occuper le premier rang dans le panthéon des Bretons continentaux ? À quoi correspondent les propos grinçants qui affluent ici ou là dans la première réécriture de sa Vie (par exemple en Prol.1 ou I.60) ? Simples lieux communs ou flèches décochées à l'endroit de contradicteurs bien réels ? À partir de quand le culte de s. Samson a-t-il reçu un accueil largement répandu en Bretagne proprement dite ? En tout cas, sa Vie ancienne ne lui forge pas encore un statut de saint « national » des Bretons²⁰². Il faut attendre le IX^e siècle avancé pour voir Samson commencer à exercer sa force d'attraction sur la suite de la production hagiographique bretonne²⁰³.

Enfin quelle est la contribution possible de la Vie ancienne de s. Samson à une histoire de Dol ? Sur quoi se fonde l'ambition de Dol à occuper le rang de capitale spirituelle de toute la Bretagne²⁰⁴ ? L'activité du Samson historique sur le continent ne vise pas que l'Armorique ; au contraire, il est remarquable de voir son ouverture vers la Neustrie. Les premiers hagiographes qui ont mis en forme le dossier de s. Samson n'ont pas cherché à présenter Dol comme un centre ecclésiastique de rang supérieur ; cela viendra plus tard, à partir des années 860, avec l'invention de prétentions archiépiscopales. Comment s'est enclenchée cette mutation des ambitions de Dol ? Qui est derrière cette mobilisation de Dol²⁰⁵ ? Est-ce que la désignation

¹⁹⁹ Chez Pomère, les mots « *sacerdos* » et « *pontifex* » désignent des évêques, d'après Plumpe, « *Pomeriana* », 227-33.

²⁰⁰ Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 62. Cet exemple peut s'ajouter au dossier rassemblé par Smith, « *Rulers and relics* ».

²⁰¹ Cartulaire de Redon, acte n° 241, daté de 869.

²⁰² Geary, « *Reflections on historiography* », 326.

²⁰³ Cf. le tableau des dépendances internes à l'hagiographie bretonne dans Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 70, corrigeant et complétant celui qui avait paru en 2003 : « *Les réécritures* », 193.

²⁰⁴ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 24-26, essaie de répondre à cette question sur le terrain de l'histoire des rapports entre les divers diocèses bretons. Un premier état de ses réflexions se trouve dans son article « *Le 'schisme breton'* », 55-59.

²⁰⁵ R. Sowerby propose d'en attribuer l'initiative à un évêque de Dol au début de la seconde moitié du IX^e siècle : « *The Lives of St Samson* », 12-14. La fresque de Jean-Pierre Leguay escamote la question des origines : « *Une ville épiscopale* ». Pour Florian Mazel, le choix d'implanter une métropole à Dol pourrait sortir d'une collusion du prélat Festien avec le roi Salomon : *L'évêque et le territoire*, 84 et 392, n.143.

unique d'« archiepiscopatum totius Britanniae » (« archiépiscopat de la Bretagne entière ») peut se réduire à l'état de simple interpolation ponctuelle, ajoutée à une *VIIIS* II.24 (*BHL* 7483) qui n'allait pas si loin dans son état primitif²⁰⁶ ? En tout cas, ce n'est pas l'assise territoriale du diocèse de Dol qui a pu donner l'idée d'en faire une capitale ecclésiastique de la Bretagne ; car Dol n'est évidemment pas un chef-lieu de *civitas* antique²⁰⁷. Mais dans la Gaule du VI^e siècle, plusieurs cas sont connus de *castra* qui ont eu des prétentions à se transformer en siège épiscopal²⁰⁸ ; serait-ce aussi le cas de Dol ? Être un *peregrinus*, dans la Vie ancienne, c'est s'exiler et prendre la tête d'un monastère : ainsi pour Umbraphel, oncle du saint, que Samson envoie comme abbé du monastère qui lui a été donné en Irlande (en I.40). Pour Samson (en I.45/46), ce sera partir sur le continent, où il fonde à Dol un monastère, pas un siège épiscopal. Il est vrai que Samson vient d'une contrée où les évêques n'exercent pas forcément leur autorité dans un cadre territorial lié à une *civitas*²⁰⁹ ; il faut sans doute manier avec souplesse la notion de diocèse territorial au Pays de Galles à l'époque de s. Samson, comme le recommande Wendy Davies²¹⁰. Sur le continent aussi, il faut compter avec « la faible territorialité des structures ecclésiastiques du haut Moyen Âge »²¹¹. L'exemple de Dubricius (appelé tantôt *papa*, tantôt *episcopus* dans la Vie ancienne) illustre bien l'entrelacement des domaines abbatial et épiscopal²¹². Quand les Carolingiens se heurtent à des chefs bretons au début du IX^e siècle, ces révoltés ne semblent pas particulièrement liés à Dol²¹³. C'est Landévennec et non pas Dol que Louis le Pieux choisit en 818 comme moteur du mouvement qui conduira la Bretagne monastique vers la norme bénédictine. Si la *VIS* a été composée ou remaniée pour répondre aux attentes ou aux besoins d'un évêque de Dol, comment interpréter le fait que Samson soit si peu campé en tant qu'évêque de Dol²¹⁴ ? Est-ce qu'on attachait plus d'importance à montrer que les Bretons vivaient en bonne intelligence avec un roi franc ? Les rapports avec Childebert occupent en effet une place considérable dans le texte de la Vie ancienne (chapitres 53-60) ; ils s'ouvrent par une insistance particulière sur leur valeur éminente parmi les *gesta* de Samson, comme l'a bien fait

²⁰⁶ C'est une proposition d'Armelle Le Huërou, dans une partie inédite de sa thèse de doctorat : 'Baudri, archevêque de Dol', I.291 (dactyl.). Relayée ensuite par Garault, « *L'Aedificatio basilicae* », 229, n.9.

²⁰⁷ Pour la Bretagne du haut Moyen Âge, Reinhold Kaiser constate l'absence de lien entre *civitas* et diocèse en dehors de Vannes, Nantes et Rennes, mais il ne se prononce pas sur les débuts du diocèse de Dol : *Bischofsherrschaft*, 118s. Mais il faut tenir compte de la plasticité des zones d'autorité des évêques en Gaule autour du VI^e siècle, comme le démontre Lauwers, « *Territorium non facere diocesim* », 28-38. Encore dans le même sens : Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 74 et, dernièrement, Lunven, « Le pouvoir épiscopal », 113-38.

²⁰⁸ Voir les exemples énumérés par Schneider, « Les églises rurales », 431-43.

²⁰⁹ Charles-Edwards, « Beyond Empire II », 89s. et 98s. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 316 et 587-90. Huw Pryce émet une hypothèse suivant laquelle les diocèses gallois du haut Moyen Âge pourraient dans certains cas correspondre à des royaumes : « Pastoral care », 47s.

²¹⁰ Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, 148-59. Point de vue partagé par Cubitt, « The institutional Church », 379.

²¹¹ Florian Mazel, préface à Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 10s. Pour un exposé complet de la thèse de F. Mazel, voir maintenant son livre *L'évêque et le territoire*.

²¹² En I.13 ; I.33/36 ; I.43/44 et II.7/9. Dans le même sens, Pryce, « Pastoral care », 51s. et 54s.

²¹³ Pour un résumé de ces difficultés, cf. Smith, *Province and Empire*, 62-85 ; et aussi la recension de cette étude par P.D. King, dans *Peritia* 11 (1997) 401-403.

²¹⁴ Même si on accepte, avec Colmán Etchingham, que la tradition galloise connaît des noms d'évêques attachés à un nom de lieu plutôt qu'à un territoire strictement délimité : « Bishoprics in Ireland », 20 et 22.

remarquer R. Sowerby²¹⁵. Le passage d'un espace diocésain plus ou moins informel à une structure territorialement définie s'est fait sous la pression des Carolingiens ; pour Dol, le résultat de cette opération fut complètement atypique sur le continent, avec la multiplication d'enclaves dispersées²¹⁶. Sauf pour Pental (St-Samson-sur-Risle, département de l'Eure), l'information relative aux enclaves de l'évêché de Dol ne provient évidemment pas de la Vie ancienne ; mais les pouillés de la fin du Moyen Âge ne peuvent pas suppléer pour la période antérieure au X^e siècle²¹⁷. L'hypothèse de création d'un diocèse carolingien autour de Gaël, vite absorbé par celui de Dol, paraît bien fragile²¹⁸.

L'épisode consacré à Judual se dénoue de deux manières : le prince breton recouvre ses droits sur toute la Domnonée (« ita ut ... in totam ... regnaverit Domnoniam » [« de telle sorte qu'il régna sur toute la Domnonée »], en I.59) grâce à l'intercession du saint²¹⁹ et Samson obtient de Childebart les moyens de fonder Pental près de l'embouchure de la Seine. Le roi reçoit le saint « cum apostolico ... honore » (« avec les honneurs apostoliques ») (I.58) ; de ces honneurs apostoliques, Flobert tire la conclusion logique que Samson est reconnu comme évêque²²⁰. Mais rien de tout cela ne renvoie spécialement à Dol ; quelle fut donc la position de Dol comme centre d'une sphère de juridiction – ou noyau central d'une *paruchia*²²¹ aux dépendances dispersées – au temps de s. Samson ? Puis au moment de la rédaction de la *primigenia* ? Et enfin au moment de sa réécriture à la fin du VIII^e siècle ? Peut-on parler d'une tension mal résolue entre les fonctions d'abbé et d'évêque chez Samson, comme on le verra plus tard chez s. Willibrord²²², lui aussi passé par l'Irlande avant de franchir la Manche ?

Il y a décidément encore beaucoup à chercher dans la Vie ancienne de s. Samson ; et à discuter, car le contexte de rédaction de la recension primitive et de sa réécriture reste encore à éclaircir.

²¹⁵ « Unum tamen maximum ac mirabillimum opus » (à l'incipit de I.53). Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 14. Mais il ne faut pas surinterpréter une telle entrée en matière, car d'autres chapitres s'ouvrent aussi par un coup de clairon sur les miracles du saint : I.45, 51, 61 (et son titre de chapitre, n° 42) ; II.14.

²¹⁶ Cartographie des enclaves en Bretagne par Guillotel, « Origines du ressort », 39 ; carte reprise par Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 20, fig.2. Ou, plus sommairement, par Tanguy, « De l'origine des évêchés bretons », 21. À compléter, pour l'enclave de Pental, par la carte de Le Maho, « Ermitages et monastères bretons », 75.

²¹⁷ Guillotel, « Origines du ressort » ; Poulin, « La question des enclaves ». À l'instar d'H. Guillotel (comme ci-dessus, 42), B. Merdrignac croit à l'existence d'un « grand domaine monastique constitué progressivement ... du VI^e au VIII^e siècle » : « La Neustrie/Normandie », 43, et encore Merdrignac & Plouchart, « La fondation des évêchés bretons », 151. Ce point de vue est partagé par Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 46-49 et 355 ; résumé par Lunven, « Construction de l'espace religieux ». Florian Mazel parle de superposition d'une seigneurie et d'un diocèse à partir du IX^e siècle : *L'évêque et le territoire*, 232s.

²¹⁸ Guigon, « The archaeology », 176.

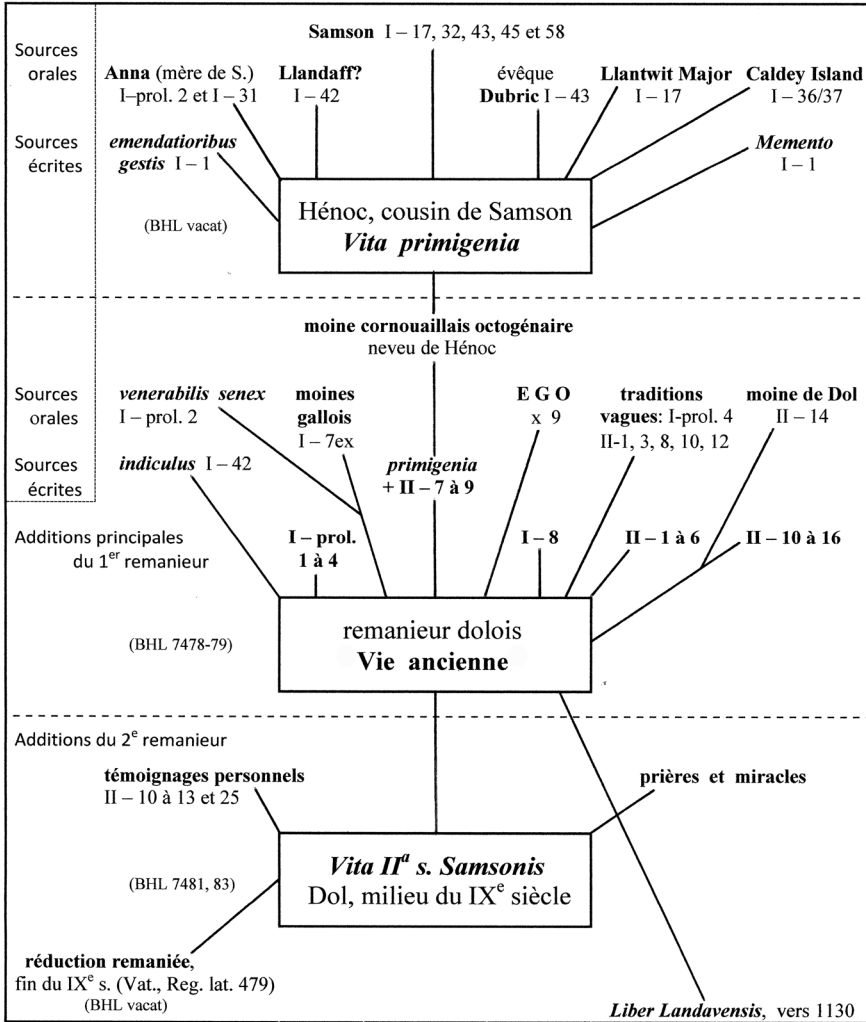
²¹⁹ Région située sur la face nord de la péninsule armoricaine, à notre avis, comme l'a bien vu Sowerby, « The Lives of St Samson », 6. M. Coumert place cette Domnonée en Grande-Bretagne : « Le peuplement de l'Armorique », 27-34. T. Charles-Edwards va trop loin, à notre avis, en incluant la Cornouaille dans la Domnonée continentale : *Wales and the Britons*, 26.

²²⁰ Flobert (éd.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson*, 230, n.1.

²²¹ Mais voir la critique de cette notion par Etchingham, « The implications of *paruchia* », puis dans son livre *Church Organisation*, s.v. Ou Charles-Edwards, « Beyond Empire II », 99, puis dans son livre *Wales and the Britons*, 584-86. Harvey, « The non-Classical vocabulary », 92, n.16 ; page 6, n.16 de la version numérique. Le mot *parochia/paruchia* est cependant absent de la Vie ancienne de Samson.

²²² Schröder, « Willibrord ». Honée, « St Willibrord », 30s.

Annexe : La circulation de l'information sur s. Samson de Dol
d'après sa Vie ancienne



THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE? *VITA PRIMA SANCTI SAMSONIS*,
VITA PATERNI, AND MEROVINGIAN HAGIOGRAPHY

Caroline Brett

In the attempt to achieve a better understanding of the First Life of St Samson (*VIS*), which is potentially a key text for the understanding of the early christian history of both Brittany and western Britain, but whose dating, authorship, and historical reliability continue to present problems, the investigation of the text's literary sources must play an important part.¹ François Kerlouégan, Neil Wright, Bernard Merdrignac, and Joseph-Claude Poulin have all made substantial contributions towards identifying the literary models for this and other works of Breton hagiography: this has helped to establish anterior and posterior dating limits for the composition of the work, and to build up a picture of the literary culture of the author or authors.²

Some of these models are popular texts that were diffused throughout Latin Christendom in the early middle ages (for instance the Life of St Martin by Sulpicius Severus, a blueprint for hagiographers everywhere in the Western Church), but one source that has the potential to provide more precise information about the contacts available to the author is the *Vita Sancti Paterni* (*VP*) by Venantius Fortunatus.³ St Paternus, according to this *Vita*, was the son of a noble Aquitanian family who became a monk and hermit in the Cotentin and then at Scissey (the future Saint-Pair-sur-Mer) on the coast of Normandy, and at the age of seventy was appointed bishop of Avranches by King Childebert I (*ob.* 558). He probably died in 564.⁴ His Life was written by Fortunatus, at the request of a certain Abbot Martianus, probably not long after the saint's death and certainly before *ca* 600 when Fortunatus himself died – thus, some time in the last third of the sixth century, considerably earlier than *VIS*,

¹ Editions: Fawtier (ed.), *La Vie de saint Samson*; Flobert (ed. and transl.), *La Vie ancienne* (now the standard edition).

² Kerlouégan, 'Les citations'; Wright, 'Knowledge of christian Latin poets'; Merdrignac, 'La première Vie'; Poulin, 'Recherche et identification'.

³ *Vita Sancti Paterni* (ed. Krusch).

⁴ This was calculated on the basis of the date of his feast-day and the information given on his death in the *Vita* by Grosjean, 'S. Paternus d'Avranches', 387. If Grosjean's arguments are accepted, the Council of Paris attended by both Paternus and Samson should be dated 561–2: Gaudemet & Basdevant (edd.), *Les Canons*, II. 410, 424; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 66. Fortunatus may have known Paternus personally: an abbot Paternus is the dedicatee of one of his short poems, 'Ad Paternum abbatem de codice emendato', ed. Leo, *Opera Poetica*, XXV (75). However, there is a chronological difficulty if Paternus died in 564: Fortunatus did not arrive in Francia from Italy until 565 (Coates, 'Venantius Fortunatus', 1009).

which is unlikely to be earlier than *ca* 650. Robert Fawtier was the first to note the similarities between the two texts, and Bernard Merdrignac in 1988 produced a table identifying a range of similar narrative motifs (see Table 4.1).⁵

Table 4.1. Correspondences between Vita Prima Sancti Samsonis and Vita Paterni by Venantius Fortunatus (after Merdrignac, 'La première Vie'; extra parallels added by C. Brett in square brackets)

<i>Vita Prima Samsonis</i>	<i>Vita Paterni</i>
Preface: The text opens with the word <i>Religiosorum</i>	Preface: The text opens with the word <i>Religiosorum</i>
I.1. Samson is born to parents <i>nobilibus atque egregiis secundum saeculi dignitatem</i>	3. Paternus is born to noble parents <i>in administratione publica</i>
His mother had been childless for a long time	His mother is a widow aged sixty
[I.10. His mentor St Ilut discourages him from excessive austerity]	[29. His abbot orders him not to exceed the Rule by isolating himself]
I.20. Finding his monastery too rowdy, he retires to the island of Piro	4. Finding his monastery too noisy, he retires <i>in quadam insula</i>
I.34. He is made <i>pistor</i> of Piro's monastery	3. He is made cellarer of his monastery
I.40–41. He retreats to a cave to live as a hermit; he makes water spring from the ground by striking it with his staff	5. He retreats to live in a cave with his friend Scubilio 8. He makes water spring from the ground by striking it with his staff
I.43. Samson sees a vision of three saints, Peter, James, and John, consecrating him as bishop	26. Paternus sees a vision of three holy bishops, Melanius, Leontianus, and Vigor, consecrating him as bishop
[I.13, I.44. Doves appear when Samson is ordained deacon and bishop, as signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit]	[36–38. Two doves that Paternus has reared follow him when he moves to a new location]
I.48. He successfully stops a pagan ceremony (<i>homines baccantum ritu quoddam phanum ... adorantes</i>)	5. He unsuccessfully tries to stop a pagan festival (<i>ad quod fanum dum ex consuetudine per sacra execrabilia debbacharet</i>)
[I.52. Starting from Dol, Samson founds many monasteries throughout the 'province']	[10. Paternus founds many monasteries in the <i>civitates</i> of Coutances, Bayeux, Le Mans, Avranches, and Rennes]
I.53. Samson travels to meet King Hiltbert to secure the freedom of Judual	14. Paternus is called to Paris to meet King Childebert.
At the royal palace, Samson cures a count possessed by a demon	His arrival in Paris is marked by the flight of demons from possessed people
[I.58–9. At the king's request, Samson expels a serpent from a cave beside the Seine; with royal support, he founds a monastery on the spot]	[14. On his way to Paris, Paternus heals a boy who has been bitten by a serpent; the locals build a church on the spot in his name]

Although the direct verbal borrowings are very slight, the resemblance is too close to be coincidental: there can be little doubt that the author of the existing text of *VIS* knew *VP* and based the narrative organisation of his own work upon it quite firmly – without, however, admitting as much. The author draws on no other text as local or as lacking in a wider diffusion. There is no evidence that the prose hagiography of

⁵ Merdrignac, 'La première Vie'.

Venantius Fortunatus had an early circulation in the British Isles. His hymns seem to have been known in Ireland very soon after they were composed, and Aldhelm knew his hagiographical poetry, but *VP* was a rarity.⁶ It survives in only nine manuscripts (compared to twice that number for *VIS*, and dozens for some of Fortunatus's more popular Lives such as the *Vita Albini*), and was apparently never rewritten during the middle ages; evidence for its use as a literary model seems to be restricted to Breton hagiography.⁷

It remains to explore the historical implications of the contact, which are many. There are implications for the process and purpose of composition of *VIS*, for the careers of the two saints themselves, and for the political and religious context of north Brittany and the Channel coast from the sixth century through to the central middle ages and beyond.

The literary dependence of VIS on VP

The dependence of *VIS* on *VP* is not a simple question, given that the existing text of *VIS* is one that shows signs of rewriting. One of the most vexed questions about *VIS* is the relationship between the text as we have it and a lost earlier Life of Samson (which may be called the **Vita primigenia*) which the author claims to have used. Does the borrowing from *Vita Paterni* shed any light on the rewriting process?⁸ Assuming the reality of a **Vita primigenia*, can we say whether the work of Venantius Fortunatus was already used in it, or 'fed in' later by the author of the existing text?

In so far as it is possible to reconstruct the earlier Life, the answer seems to be that the *Vita Paterni* borrowings are integral to it. Joseph-Claude Poulin has argued that the contribution of the earlier author can be identified on the basis of the list of chapter-headings that survives in the two earliest manuscripts: any material not covered by these chapter-headings, he thinks, is likely to have been introduced by the second author. On this basis, he has suggested that *VP* was used by the earlier author, and that the creator of the existing text did not introduce any more *VP*-material.⁹ He also believes that the **Vita primigenia*, like the existing *VIS*, was written at Dol as late as the second half of the eighth century, but that it was then removed to Cornwall, where the *VIS*-author (working in the late eighth or early ninth century) had to go to consult it. He bases this on the statement in the Prologue that Henoc, St Samson's cousin, had taken a written Life 'away across the sea', that is, to Britain.

These conclusions have been questioned more recently. Thomas Charles-Edwards and Richard Sowerby have both argued for an earlier dating of *VIS* ('seventh century' Charles-Edwards, 'end of the seventh century/beginning of the eighth' Sowerby) and hence for an even earlier **Vita primigenia*.¹⁰ Moreover, Sowerby prefers to distinguish the contributions of the two authors on the basis of their apparent aims and narrative logic. He points out that almost the whole of the existing text is directed towards Samson's foundation of a monastery in Cornwall as the climax of his career, following his episcopal ordination, which takes place in a blizzard of miracles; the

⁶ Stevenson, 'Irish hymns'; Lapidge, 'Knowledge of the poems'; Hunt, 'Manuscript evidence'.

⁷ For the manuscripts of *VP* see the Bollandists' website, <http://bhlms.fltr.ucl.ac.be>, and Krusch (ed.), *Vita Sancti Paterni*.

⁸ Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson'.

⁹ Poulin, 'La "Vie ancienne"'.

¹⁰ Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', 21; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 238–9 and n.58.

much shorter section (book I, chs 52–61) about his activities in Brittany is tacked on and, as Samson's 'greatest miracle', the episode involving rival Breton rulers and King Childebert is an afterthought. Sowerby therefore suggests that the **Vita primigenia* was written in Cornwall, and calls it the 'Cornish Life' – the reason it was needed being perhaps that the status of the Cornish monastery was precarious without the physical remains of the saint.

I find this idea attractive, but the use of *Vita Paterni* complicates it. If the contributions of the two authors are distinguished as suggested by Sowerby, then both seem to depend equally strongly on *Vita Paterni*. The story of the saint being consecrated as bishop by three saints in a vision is an essential part of the *primigenia*-author's build-up to his climactic scene, and is one of the clearest borrowings from *VP*. If Sowerby is right and the *primigenia* was an Insular work, its author's knowledge of *Vita Paterni* would be that much more remarkable. But the visit of the saint to Childebert and its accompanying miracles is an equally clear borrowing, and this (thinks Sowerby) was a contribution of the later Dol author. It seems clear that dependence on *VP* gives a sort of unity to *VIS* as it stands. If Sowerby's theory of the division of labour between the *primigenia*-author and the *VIS*-author is to be saved, we must suppose that *Vita Paterni* was available to be consulted by both authors – wherever they worked – and perhaps that the second author was aware of the use of it by the first, and regarded it as a blueprint that could continue to offer him guidance. We may note that the author of the Second Life of St Samson, writing in the 850s–60s, included an extended verbatim quotation from *VP* in his work, unlike the two earlier authors, who merely drew on elements of the narrative.¹¹ On this evidence, the text – probably in the form of a *libellus*, or soft-covered single-text booklet – was part of the equipment of St Samson's devotees throughout the development of his cult, and might even have travelled with hagiographers between Brittany and Cornwall. It may have been *via* Dol that the text was made available to other local hagiographers: Bili, in his Life of St Malo (*ca* 870), and possibly the author of the ninth-century *Vita Sancti Melanii*, both active in north-east Brittany, also quoted from *VP*, although I am not aware that any other Merovingian or Carolingian saint's life used it as a model.¹²

The Vitae as evidence for the careers of the two saints

It is not at all surprising to find the Life of St Paternus serving as a model for that of St Samson. Dol and Avranches are 44 km apart by land and an easy coasting voyage by sea. Saint-Pair (Scissey) is only about 25 km further. Not only that, but St Samson and St Paternus were contemporaries who are likely to have met. Both are recorded as having been present at the Council of Paris, held between 556 and 573, although this event is not mentioned in either Life. What is more surprising is that any relationship between them, or their monastic foundations, that may have existed (friendly or otherwise) was apparently not of any interest to the authors of their *Vitae*. The author of *VIS* made no reference to St Paternus as such, and was interested only in the hagiographical motifs modelled in his biography. If a preliminary stage of

¹¹ Kerlouégan, 'Les citations', 223; Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 339–40.

¹² Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 159, 244. An online search of the *Vitae Sanctorum Aevi Merovingici* volumes in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica series revealed no use of *Vita Paterni*, while Fortunatus's *Vita Albini* was quoted in six different texts.

composition of the Life of Samson took place in Cornwall, and/or with the saint's British career as the sole focus, then the use of *VP* as a model is perhaps slightly more surprising, but the failure to mention Paternus is more natural. In the case of the composition that took place at Dol with Samson's Continental career in mind, political motives may have come into play, which I shall discuss further below.

VP was highly compatible as a model for *VIS*. The basic structure of the confessor's life, passing through education and monastic life (with ever-greater feats of asceticism) to leadership of the christian flock as a bishop, was fixed by Sulpicius's Life of St Martin and reproduced in most of the sixth-century hagiography of Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus.¹³ However, the Life of St Paternus stands out as giving greater emphasis to the 'wandering monk and hermit' phases of the saint's career, although he did eventually become a bishop. This was an emphasis that was to become much more common in seventh-century saints' Lives from both the Insular world and Merovingian Francia, in which the protagonist remained essentially the leader of a cenobitic community despite becoming a bishop (St Audomar, St Amandus, St Cuthbert) or never became a bishop at all (St Columba, St Columbanus, St Wandrille, and other Merovingian monastic founders).¹⁴ The question is, did the authors of the Life of St Samson choose *VP* as a blueprint because – for a sixth-century Gaulish saint – St Paternus's career path was unusually similar to what was known of St Samson's? Or does the heavy use of *VP* to structure *VIS* imply that very little was definitely known of St Samson, and that a few fragmentary traditions were being hung on a borrowed framework? I believe the former is the case: the circumstantial detail and the stylistic individuality of *VIS* go well beyond the framework provided by *VP*, and the similarities may be at least partly due to a very similar context for the two saints' real careers. *VP* almost certainly became a model for *VIS* through the accident of geographic proximity, yet perhaps it was not such an accident. This liminal area, close to the pagan kingdoms of south-east England as well as to the Breton offshoots of the post-Roman British kingdoms, may well have been an early focus for the kind of rural monasticism that Gildas, Winniau, David, and others, like Samson, were simultaneously pioneering.

St Paternus is the only local saint of the Avranchin with a near-contemporary Life, but his Life itself provides evidence of a considerable christian organisation in the region. Merovingian conciliar records, and the works of Gregory of Tours, also attest to a series of bishops of Avranches and Coutances through the sixth century.¹⁵ A number of local saints, such as SS. Senator and Severus, St Marculf and St Helier, the Breton St Armel, and St Vigor of Bayeux, were commemorated as monastic founders in later Lives and cults, suggesting that the north-west coast of Normandy and its adjacent islands were a magnet for monks and hermits during the sixth century.¹⁶ This organisation was strengthened further (according to Fortunatus) by St Paternus's own monastic foundations. The implication is that St Samson must have intruded into an already busy religious landscape, and that he and St Paternus were contemporaries doing almost exactly the same thing in the same place. Fortunatus credits Paternus with founding 'many monasteries' in the *civitates* of Coutances,

¹³ Collins, 'Observations on the form'.

¹⁴ Fouracre & Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 5.

¹⁵ Levalet, *Avranches et la cité des Abricantes*, 174; Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux*, 220–5, 237–41.

¹⁶ Laporte, 'Les origines du monachisme'; Hourlier, 'Le Mont-Saint-Michel avant 966', 16–19; Le Maho, 'Ermitages et monastères'.

Avranches, Bayeux, Le Mans, and 'Redones Britanniae', while *VIS* refers in very similar language to St Samson 'founding many monasteries over the whole province'.¹⁷ Which province is left vague; but St Samson's two named foundations of Dol and Pental (Saint-Samson-sur-Risle) precisely bracketed Paternus's main arena of activity. The reference to 'Rennes of Britain/Brittany' implies (as no other text does) that when Fortunatus wrote, a part of the *civitas* of the Redones was notable for British settlement and had perhaps even been ceded to Breton political control. The coastal area including Dol would be the obvious candidate, and the implication, again, is that Paternus and Samson were active in precisely the same area.¹⁸ This would easily explain how St Samson's hagiographers came to have access to the Life of St Paternus commissioned by one of his successors, and also, perhaps, why they wished to maintain silence about his role: as a Gallo-Roman (rather than an intruding Briton) and the canonically appointed bishop of an established see, rather than an immigrant bishop without portfolio, he clearly had more legitimacy as a monastic founder than did Samson.

Another respect in which the careers of the two saints were comparable was the royal patronage they secured. This must not be exaggerated. We have seen that there is abundant evidence for the founding of monasteries and hermitages on the coast of Normandy in the sixth century, but these seem for the most part to have been private and episcopal initiatives; there is little evidence for Jacques Le Maho's suggestion that they were symptomatic of 'un intérêt nouveau du pouvoir mérovingien pour les choses de la mer, ainsi que les prémices d'une politique de réappropriation de ces espaces littoraux'.¹⁹ Royal support for monasteries was not yet common in the sixth century.²⁰ In *VP*, the saint's career in no way depends on King Childebert's patronage: the king's invitation to Paternus to meet him in Paris is a simple expression of respect and interest in an already famous holy man, and results in a promise to provide food for the poor, but not (it must be stressed) in any donation of property to the saint himself. In *VIS*, St Samson's royal encounter is partly poached from that of St Paternus, but also greatly inflated in political (and miraculous) importance. The very fact that it is Childebert who appears in *VIS* may be due to the influence of *VP* (and Poulin has suggested that this was the gateway to his adoption as the Merovingian of choice in all subsequent Breton hagiography).²¹ The royal encounter itself, however, is unlikely to be an invention. The independent evidence (such as it is) suggests that Samson's contact was with King Charibert (561–7) and/or Chilperic, 'whose kingdom included Rennes between 567 and 584 [when he died] and probably Avranches after Sigebert I's death in 575'.²² The Council of Paris which Samson and Paternus attended most probably took place in Charibert's reign, in 561–2, thus in the last few

¹⁷ *VP*, 10: 'Denique per civitates Constantiam scilicet, Baiocas, Cinomannis, Abrincas, Redones Britanniae multa monasteria per eum domino sunt fundata'; *VIS*, I.52: 'multaque inde mirabilium opera seminans ac multa monasteria per totam pene prouintiam fundens'.

¹⁸ Bernard Tanguy has argued that the whole coastal section of the *civitas* of Rennes had been transferred to the *Coriosolites* and placed under the military stronghold of Alet in the late Roman Empire, but the evidence for this does not seem conclusive: Tanguy, 'Des cités et diocèses', 94–6.

¹⁹ 'A new Merovingian interest in maritime affairs, and the beginnings of a policy of reappropriation of these coastal regions': Le Maho, 'Ermitages et monastères', 77.

²⁰ Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints*, 195.

²¹ 'Est-ce par cette voie que Childebert s'est introduit dans l'hagiographie bretonne?' Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 316.

²² Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 66, and see above, n.4.

years of Paternus's life, and it was in 575 that Chilperic's son, named Samson, was born at Tournai; Thomas Charles-Edwards has suggested that St Samson himself baptised him. This implies that the saint was held in high regard at the Merovingian court, whatever the truth of the political details in *VIS*. (This slightly later date also fits better with the role of 'Commorus' as villain in *VIS*: Gregory of Tours gives the date of 560 for Conomor's death, creating a difficulty if the 'Commorus' episode in *VIS* took place in the reign of Childebert, who died in 558.) Thus, Samson is quite likely really to have exceeded Paternus in political influence; but the writer of his *Vita* had a motive to magnify this influence of which Venantius, in his *VP*, was quite innocent – of which more in a moment.

Rather than addressing the question of the date of *VIS* directly, I shall now discuss how its composition might fit into the ecclesiastical context of northern Gaul between the mid-seventh and the mid-eighth centuries.

Possible contexts for the composition of VIS, seventh and eighth centuries

Sowerby is not very optimistic about deducing the political motives behind the production of *VIS*.²³ However, accepting the view that the work was composed in its present form in the later seventh century or early in the eighth, and assuming that it was intended for a wide public in Merovingian Francia and not only for local Breton or British consumption, it may be possible to make some guesses. What I would like to propose is that the composition of the existing *VIS* was an adaptation to the rapidly changing ecclesiastical climate of the seventh century; a comparison with St Paternus continues to be instructive because the churches of St Paternus did not so adapt, and thus ended up with their cult and lands under the control of others.

How does *VIS* compare with Merovingian hagiography of its time? Duine wrote in favour of an early date for *VIS* that its Latin is 'très mérovingienne'.²⁴ It does have some of the grammatical and orthographic features of late Merovingian Latin, but it also has many atypical features.²⁵ Merovingian hagiography does not show the basic unease with Latin, the inability to string a coherent sentence together, that we see in *VIS*. But then, its style, except in the prefaces, is usually simpler, with a smaller vocabulary and shorter sentences. Despite the language difficulties of the author of *VIS*, his work is both ambitious and in many ways intelligent. It is considerably longer than most seventh-century Merovingian saints' lives. It maintains a unity of style, treating every episode with the same painstaking attention to detail and frequent use of direct speech. The author refuses to disturb his style with borrowings of more than a few words at a time. Verbatim quotations from *VP* would have been quite unsuitable for his literary purpose, since Fortunatus's style is as compressed and understated as the *VIS*-author's is long-winded and grandiloquent. He has plenty of material – including a spectacular series of miracles that puts most Merovingian saints in the shade – and weaves it into a purposeful narrative, unusually interconnected by cross-references, as Sowerby has pointed out. Compared to the mild courtier hero of

²³ Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', 19, 23.

²⁴ Duine, 'La Vie de saint Samson', 339.

²⁵ For a summary of the characteristics of Merovingian Latin see Fouracre & Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 71–3; for the language of *VIS* see Flobert (ed.), *La Vie ancienne*, 63–84.

the average seventh-century saintly biography, Samson is presented as a 'holy man extraordinary'.²⁶

One immediately thinks of St Columbanus (*ob.* 615), who dominated the monastic landscape of northern Gaul, especially after his *Life* was written by Jonas in about 640. The generation after Columbanus saw a great expansion of monasticism in Gaul, lavishly funded for the first time by the Merovingian kings and aristocracy. Whether this expansion was directly inspired by Insular practice, or whether Columbanus merely provided the catalyst for a home-grown Frankish development, is debatable, but it was certainly new.²⁷ Many monasteries are mentioned in the works of Gregory of Tours and other late antique and early Merovingian hagiography, but nearly all were ephemeral, formed by monks themselves to satisfy their yearning for an ascetic life, but without the dynastic support and landed wealth that would ensure permanence.²⁸ This includes the many monasteries supposedly founded by St Paternus. Only the one where he was buried, Sciscy, is evidenced outside his *Vita*, and even its wealth was limited and localised. The meeting of St Paternus with King Chilbert in *VP*, on which the author of *VIS* may have modelled Samson's royal encounter, did *not*, as I said, result in a grant of land. It was not wealth and family memory that ensured the survival of Paternus's cult in Normandy, but his relics and the existence of his *Vita*. It is likely that his foundations had declined in relative importance by the time that *VIS* was written; some of them may already have disappeared – another reason why *VP* may have been regarded more as a literary model than as a relevant factual source by the author of *VIS*.

The insistence on a royal donation as the origin of Samson's monastery of Pental fits much better with the post-Columbanus monastic world than with the earlier situation. Dol, unlike Sciscy, managed to make the transition from the old to the new style of monasticism, as a royal-backed, landed house. To this end its acquisition and retention of its properties outside Brittany – Pental and *Rotmou* – must have been vital.²⁹ Whether it really received Pental during St Samson's lifetime is open to doubt. If it did, this was an astonishing coup, making Dol one of a mere handful of monasteries that received royal grants in the sixth century, and the earliest recorded as having a presence on the Seine estuary, which became a hive of activity from the mid-seventh century, with monasteries on the spot (Saint-Wandrille, founded 649; Jumièges, founded 654; Fécamp, 40 km away on the north coast, founded 658) jostling with estates belonging to more distant churches (Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Bayeux).³⁰ Perhaps *VIS* was written partly to give the prestige of antiquity to a more recent claim to this valuable property, perhaps to support a genuinely old claim in a suddenly more competitive atmosphere? Whatever the case, the outcome was successful. That there had been some dispute, though, is suggested by the *Vita Sancti Geremari*, a *Life* of the founding abbot of Saint-Germer-sur-Fly in the diocese of Beauvais: the text is of uncertain date but was probably composed before 851.³¹

²⁶ This phrase was coined by A.P. Smyth in his *Warlords and Holy Men*, 84, to describe St Columba.

²⁷ Wood, 'The *Vita Columbani*'. For general discussion of monastic developments in seventh-century Francia see Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints*.

²⁸ Brown, 'The rise', 221–3.

²⁹ For discussion of the sites of Pental and *Rotmou* (perhaps the present-day Saint-Samson-en-Auge), see Le Maho, 'Ermitages et monastères'.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 84–6.

³¹ Lifshitz, *The Norman Conquest*, 225–8, argues that the *Vita Geremari* dates from after the refoundation of Fly in 1030.

According to this, St Geremar was a member of the circle of Audoen, referendary of King Dagobert I and then bishop of Rouen (*ob.* early 680s). As bishop of Rouen, Audoen would have been the diocesan authority over the monastery of Pental. As such, he appointed Geremar as abbot of Pental during the reign of Clovis II (639–58). A few of the monks plotted to murder Geremar, whereupon he withdrew to live as a hermit in ‘the cave in the waste and solitude on the river Seine, from which Samson expelled a serpent’ (*‘illa cripta, que est in vasto ac in solitudine super fluvium Sequani, unde Samson serpentem eiecit’*).³² At the least, this story shows that St Samson was accepted as the founder of Pental by a Beauvais author in the first half of the ninth century; if genuine, it reveals that Pental was active and apparently the scene of dispute between a monastic faction and the bishop of Rouen in the mid-seventh century.³³ Did the monks consider that Audoen had infringed a royal immunity by appointing an abbot for them? They seem to have carried their point; by the time that the Second Life of St Samson was written in the 850s–60s, Pental was apparently securely in the possession of Dol and had been joined by *Rotmou*.

It was perhaps not only property, but high-level support and patronage that was at stake for Dol after the ‘Columbanian revolution’ in Frankish monasticism. The Bishop Audoen just mentioned, otherwise known as Dado or St Ouen, was an early supporter of St Columbanus who through his friendship circle influenced almost the whole Neustrian religious and political establishment and steered it in the direction of founding and patronising Columbanian monasteries.³⁴ (One of his protégés, Ragentramnus, archdeacon of Rouen, became bishop of Avranches in 681/83, bringing Audoen’s influence to the gates of Brittany.³⁵) Just as the founding saints of this group – St Eligius, St Wandrille, St Philibert, St Audomar (Omer) – were jointly inspired by Columbanus, so their Lives form a textually interconnected group making use of Jonas’s *Vita Columbani* and other texts of the Luxeuil-Bobbio connection – from which *VIS* stands apart, perhaps pointedly. Columbanus’s earliest followers included Britons or Bretons as well as Irish. According to Jonas, the saint’s first monastic foundation at Annegrav was assisted by a neighbouring abbot with a British name, Carantoc; there were Britons among his monks, and on his way into exile in 610 he travelled between Gaul and Ireland via northern Brittany as well as stopping in Nantes. Soon, important figures from western Normandy and from Brittany itself were taking an interest in Columbanian monasticism. One of Columbanus’s disciples, Potentinus, had set up a monastery near Coutances, ‘in the Armorican region’ (*‘armoricana in loca’*), in *ca* 610.³⁶ St Audomar (Omer) (*ob. ca* 669) and St Bertin (*ob. ca* 709), who became monks at Luxeuil and then founded the monastery of *Sithiu* in the Pas-de-Calais, were both from the Cotentin. They were joined by the Breton Winnoc, whose *Vita* forms a triptych with theirs.³⁷ King

³² *Vita Geremari*, 11 (ed. Krusch, 631).

³³ For discussion of the episode see Le Maho, ‘Ermitages et monastères’, 79 and references.

³⁴ On Audoen and his circle see Fouracre & Gerberding, *Later Merovingian France*, 147–50; Fox, *Power and Religion*, 76–81.

³⁵ Hourlier, ‘Le Mont-Saint-Michel avant 966’, 19; Weidemann, ‘Bischofsherrschaft und Königtum’, 170.

³⁶ *Vita Columbani*, I.4, I.7, I.20, I.21 (ed. Krusch, 71, 73, 92, 94). For discussion of the impact of Columbanian monasticism in Brittany see Picard, ‘Entre Bretagne et Normandie’, 51–5.

³⁷ Levison (ed.), *Vitae Audomari, Bertini, Winnoci*. Among the early manuscripts from the library of Saint-Bertin is a seventh-century leaf of *Glossae super Amos* ‘in an Irish or Welsh script’: Lowe (ed.), *Codices latini antiquiores*, VI.828, discussed by Ugé, *Creating the Monastic Past*, 40. Might this be a survival of the Breton presence?

Judicaël of Brittany appears, from an episode of *ca* 636 recounted in Fredegar's *Chronicle* and in *Vita Eligii*, to have been on good terms with St Audoen and St Eligius and respected the former's 'holy life'.³⁸ Judoc, the brother of Judicaël (if his *Vita* is to be trusted) took up the monastic life at Saint-Josse-sur-Mer under the patronage of Duke Haimo of Ponthieu, who, though not a Columbanian, was patron of another Irish saint, Fursey (*ob. ca* 650).³⁹

In this context, it seems worth suggesting that one possible motive in writing or rewriting a Life of St Samson any time from the 630s onwards was to attempt (perhaps successfully) to reclaim the patronage of Judicaël's dynasty for St Samson's old-established church of Dol, away from upstart foundations such as Saint-Josse and *Sithiu*. If Judicaël and his successors favoured the latter, it would be as well to remind them that their ancestor owed his life and kingship to the intervention of St Samson.

Some aspects of the updated *VIS* may be read as a veiled challenge to *Vita Columbani*. An emphasis on Columbanus's exotic Irish background made Jonas's Life more appealing; similarly in *VIS* the saint's British background is dwelt upon, although this was a risky strategy, given the ongoing marginalization of the Britons by the Anglo-Saxon and Frankish Churches.⁴⁰ *VIS*, like *Vita Columbani*, ends in an outburst of political violence, the freeing of prisoners, and the vindication of the saint; the 'wicked queen' episode might be directly based on the role of Brunhild in *Vita Columbani*, rather than simply sharing in a hagiographic cliché – which had barely taken shape by the late seventh century.

All this provides plausible context for the composition of *VIS* in the second half of the seventh century. But if we accept the identification of the patron, Tigernomaglus, addressed in the work's preface with the 'Tigermal ...' whose obit in 707 is given in the *Annals of Lorsch*, then a dating in the last years of the seventh century or the very beginning of the eighth is indicated.⁴¹ Several more political factors may then come into play.

It can be argued that royal Frankish influence over the Breton borderlands reached its nadir in the period between approximately 685 and 750.⁴² Narrative sources and charters alike are silent on any royal or official activity in the Rennais, Nantais, and the west of Normandy. Even during the times of greatest weakness of the Merovingian kingdom and the dynastic struggles of the early Carolingians, rulers maintained their grip on the rich monasteries of the Seine valley and the north coast, such as St Wandrille, Jumièges and *Sithiu* (Saint-Bertin). However, the Breton borderlands were almost completely off the royal radar, and in the last decade of the seventh century and the early years of the eighth an independent power bloc may have existed in this region under a certain Agatheus, who, according to the *Vita Ermenlandi*, functioned as both count and bishop of Nantes and Rennes; he was also, it seems, bishop of Coutances and of Chartres in *ca* 700.⁴³

If *VIS* is to be dated to *ca* 700, we might look for reflections of these events, as much as those of the 630s, in the famous Judual/Commorus episode. A local strongman like Agatheus might be cast as the 'unjust and external judge'; Samson's

³⁸ *Chronicle of Fredegar*, IV.78; Wallace-Hadrill (ed. & transl.), *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, 66; *Vita Eligii Episcopi Noviomagensis*, I.13 (ed. Krusch, 680).

³⁹ Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 98–119; Picard, 'Entre Bretagne et Normandie', 53–4.

⁴⁰ A process well analysed by Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 226–8, 238–41.

⁴¹ Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', 20–2 and references.

⁴² Brett, 'In the margins of history?'

⁴³ *Vita Ermenlandi*, 13 (ed. Levison, 699); Brunterc'h, 'Le duché du Maine', 41.

appeal to King Childebert might be a royalist statement. If Bishop Tigernomagus, who commissioned *VIS*, was commemorated in the pro-Carolingian Annals of Lorsch, this might be an indication that Dol supported the new Carolingian regime and identified it as the legitimate heir to the Merovingian kings, in the hope that it would lend its support against local rivals. One such rival may have been the monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel, 30 km from Dol, which was ultimately (in the 1020s) to gain possession of St Paternus's foundation of Saint-Pair-sur-Mer.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the origin and early history of Mont-Saint-Michel are too little known to allow this argument to be developed.⁴⁵

Moving on into the eighth century, events that might provide an alternative context for the composition of *VIS* are still harder to find, given how little is known of Brittany and western Normandy at this time. However, it does seem clear that the cult of St Samson had begun to be accepted in Francia by the later eighth century and that the monastery of Saint-Wandrille – close neighbour to St Samson's monastery at Pental – played a part in this. St Samson has an entry in the Saint-Wandrille martyrology, in which St Paternus also appears, among a very small number of Neustrian saints.⁴⁶ The *Gesta Abbatum Fontanellensium* states that Ansegisus, abbot of St Wandrille, left a bequest to Pental (as well as to Saint-Germer and other monasteries) on his death in 833.⁴⁷ Samson's reputation spread further: relics of St Samson were held at Chelles, near Paris, in the mid-eighth century and at Pfäfers in Rhaetia in 820–30.⁴⁸ If the composition of *VIS* was aimed at promoting St Samson's cult to the wider Frankish church, it seems to have worked.

Indeed, probably *VIS* and the other sources show us only a fraction of Dol's success. In the later middle ages, and up to the French Revolution, the diocese of Dol possessed 'enclaves' in six neighbouring dioceses, their extent exceeding that of the central core, a situation unparalleled in other French dioceses. In his study of Dol's territory, Hubert Guillotel suggested that the period between the sixth century and the ninth was the likeliest time for its formation, and that the scattered diocese – which has generally been held up by historians as an example of a 'typically Celtic' monastic *paruchia* – may rather be compared in the extent of its property holding to one of the great Merovingian monasteries: indeed, Guillotel believed that it *was* such a monastery until it was reformed as a 'territorial diocese' in the Carolingian period.⁴⁹ It would be unsafe to assume, as Guillotel implied, that all the areas over which Dol later claimed jurisdiction were actually the property of St Samson's foundation in the pre-Carolingian period. Dol's rights over them may have varied in nature, or have

⁴⁴ Keats-Rohan (ed.), *The Cartulary*, no.2, 76–9.

⁴⁵ Historical evidence for the existence of Mont-Saint-Michel emerges only in the mid-ninth century, when various hagiographical works refer to it as a place of pilgrimage, and its foundation account, *Revelatio ecclesiae sancti Michaelis*, was composed. There is no good authority for the foundation date of 708 given in a twelfth-century house chronicle, nor for the identity or even the existence of Bishop Aubert of Avranches, its alleged founder. The dubious historicity of its origin stories unfortunately precludes any attempts to use them to shed light on politics in the region in the eighth century. Simonet, 'La fondation', *contra* Bouet & Desbordes (edd.), *Chroniques latines*, 70 and Déceneux, *Le Mont-Saint-Michel*. However, there are good grounds for seeing Mont-Saint-Michel as primarily a Breton monastery until the mid-eleventh century: Potts, 'Normandy or Brittany?'

⁴⁶ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 19–20; Laporte, 'Les recensions'.

⁴⁷ Lohier & Laporte (edd.), *Gesta Sanctorum Patrum*, 112.

⁴⁸ Hen, *Culture and Religion*, 94–5; Piper (ed.), *Libri confraternitatum*, 395; see discussion and references in Merdrignac, *D'une Bretagne à l'autre*, 102–3.

⁴⁹ Guillotel, 'Les origines'.

been poorly defined in many cases. It seems clear, however, that Dol enjoyed the full benefit of the Merovingian revolution in monastic endowment, patronized both by Merovingian and by local Breton rulers and nobility – and that this was a revolution that may have been inspired, in the first place, by Samson and his British experience, even before Columbanus's more spectacular career. Dol may have been protected from the jurisdiction of its neighbouring bishops by a Merovingian privilege of immunity; and/or it may normally itself have been the seat of a bishop from the outset. The appearance of bishops, without dioceses, at the head of monasteries was a feature of the Merovingian Church in the late seventh and eighth centuries: an example is the monastery of Lobbes, raised to episcopal status by the Pippinids as an element of their frontier policy in northern Neustria. Without suggesting that the practice was generically 'Celtic', Anne Lunven has raised the possibility that the case of Dol was an early instance that set a precedent, for similar political reasons.⁵⁰

Under the Carolingians, the functions of monks and secular clergy were more firmly separated and monasteries replaced under the control of diocesan bishops. Dol, thanks to its prestige and its diplomatic value as a bridge between Franks and Bretons, was established as a regular territorial diocese probably in the context of the Carolingian conquest of Brittany.⁵¹ Its respectability beyond Brittany is further illustrated by the reference in *Vita Leutfredi* (ca 825 × 850) to a bishop John of Dol officiating at a translation of relics at Évreux.⁵² The wealth and high profile of Samson's church and cult must have had a bearing on the choice of Dol for King Salomon's attempt to create an archbishopric of Brittany in the 860s. Hence the composition of the Second Life of St Samson to support the archiepiscopal claims more overtly, as well as deleting some of the increasingly irrelevant and perhaps embarrassing British background.⁵³

Relations between St Paternus and St Samson, ninth century and after

With the rise of Brittany as a political unit in the ninth century, new opportunities arose for the interpenetration of Breton and Neustrian saints' cults. In 870 the Cotentin peninsula was ceded to King Salomon of Brittany by Charles the Bald, and some signs of Breton landowning and religious influence in the region appear at this time.⁵⁴ Viking attacks on the Breton and Norman coasts in the early tenth century caused a great uprooting and mingling of relics, cults, and clergy, as Breton clergy

⁵⁰ Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 44–9, sums up the arguments for the pre-Carolingian status of Dol. De Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism', 627, cites a ruling of the Synod of Attigny (672) in which 'bishops with a diocese' are distinguished from 'bishops from a monastery'. There is no need to suppose, as Joseph-Claude Poulin argued at the Sydney St Samson colloquium, that the naming of two bishops of Dol (Tigernomaglus and Leucherus) in *VIS* is evidence for a late, Carolingian date for the text.

⁵¹ Guillotel's suggestion to this effect ('Les origines', 61–6) has been generally accepted, most recently by Lunven, *Du diocèse à la paroisse*, 40.

⁵² *Vita et miracula Leutfredi*, 25 (ed. Levison, 16). Lifshitz, however, suggests that the *Vita* should be dated to Charlemagne's reign prior to 800, and that the position of Bishop John suggests a Breton–Neustrian alliance against Carolingian encroachment: *The Norman Conquest*, 51–2.

⁵³ Smith, 'The "archbishopric"'. .

⁵⁴ Notably, there is a mention of a Breton abbot of Mont-Saint-Michel, 'Phinimontius Britto', in the *Itinerarium Bernardi* composed in ca 870: *Itinerarium Bernardi*, 22 (ed. Ackermann, 126); Van Thorhout, 'Les Bretons', 126–7; Levalet, *Avranches*, 185–7.

took refuge with their treasures in various parts of Francia, Normandy and Britain.⁵⁵ Finally, much new exchange of hagiography and saintly traditions took place in the wake of the Norman conquest of England. In this context, we can see the cult of St Samson first becoming openly linked with that of St Paternus, and then apparently becoming the dominant partner.

The most striking evidence for a connection appears at the beginning of the tenth century.⁵⁶ The text *Translatio Sancti Maglorii* suggests that in the 920s the clergy of Dol had joined forces with those of Lehon, Alet, Bayeux, and elsewhere to remove themselves and their saints' relics from the danger of Viking attack.⁵⁷ As the narrative opens, the relics of St Paternus and his associates Scubilio and Senator are implied to have already been in the possession of the Dol clergy.⁵⁸ They all ended up in Paris under the protection of Count Hugh the Great. Perhaps during the three years of wandering that the *Translatio* recounts took place before they found refuge there, Radbod, prior of Dol, sent a gift of relics of SS. Paternus, Scubilio, and Senator to King Æthelstan of England (924–39) in a bid to gain his support. The evidence is a letter preserved in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum*.⁵⁹ Although the letter does not say so, William tells us elsewhere that Æthelstan also obtained relics of St Samson (probably as part of the same negotiation) and placed relics of all four saints in his monastic foundation of Milton in Dorset.⁶⁰

According to *Translatio Sancti Maglorii*, there were still relics of Samson and the three Avranches saints available to be placed in the church of St Bartholomew in Paris. When peace returned, the Breton guardians of St Samson's relics wished to return to Brittany, but Count Hugh forced them to leave the greater part of the relics. The monks got no further than Orléans, where King Robert I (Hugh's father) persuaded them to give him the remaining relics of Samson, which he placed in the church of St Symphorian. (However, despite the flight of its relics and the exile of some at least of its clergy, the church of Dol suffered no long-term diminution of its

⁵⁵ Many saints from the region that became Normandy were likewise re-homed in the ninth and tenth centuries, but the extent to which their movements were genuinely caused by Viking attacks, or should be seen as opportunistic seizures by kings and nobles, has been the subject of a reassessment by Lifshitz, 'The migration of Neustrian relics'. It may be interesting to investigate how far these ideas are applicable to Brittany.

⁵⁶ The evidence that follows is helpfully collected in Doble, *Saint Patern*.

⁵⁷ *Translatio Sancti Maglorii*, text in Merlet, 'Les origines', and in Guillotel, 'L'exode', 310–15. The historical value of the text has been essentially rehabilitated by Guillotel; see discussion in Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 223–5.

⁵⁸ 'Iam metas excesserant patrie, cum Dolensis necnon et Baiocensis ecclesie ministri se illorum iunxerunt comitatui, ferentes secum sancti patriarche Sansonis insuper et gloriosi episcopi Senatoris sanctorumque pontificum Paterni et Scubilionis venerabiles artus ...' 'They [the clergy of Lehon and Alet] had already gone past the frontiers of their homeland when the ministers of the churches of Dol and Bayeux joined their company, carrying with them the venerable bodies of the holy patriarch Samson and also the glorious bishop Senator and the holy pontiffs Paternus and Scubilio': *Translatio Sancti Maglorii*, 1 (ed. Guillotel, 'L'exode', 310: translation mine). Van Tourhoudt, 'La mobilité', 19, infers that the see of Avranches as a whole had passed into Dol's control at this time.

⁵⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* V.249 (edd. & transl. Winterbottom & Thomson, 597–9). Guillotel suggested that the relics were sent to Æthelstan in association with Hugh's embassy of 926 asking for the hand of Æthelstan's sister, but if Radbod's letter was sent under Hugh's auspices, its reference to the Dol clergy living in 'exile and captivity' was rather unflattering to the count: Guillotel, 'L'exode', 297; Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult of St Petroc*, 102–3.

⁶⁰ *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, II.86 (edd. & transl. Winterbottom & Thomson, 293).

property or status: by 970, according to a letter of Pope John XIII, Wicohen, bishop of Dol, was reviving his see's archiepiscopal claims, and he may have created the new sees of Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier to support them.)⁶¹

The evidence of the *Translatio* is borne out by liturgical evidence from the late tenth-century Sacramentary of Ratoldus (Paris, BN MS lat. 12052). This manuscript, commissioned by Ratoldus, abbot of Corbie (972–86), includes Mass texts in honour of the patron saints of Saint-Denis, Paris, a patronal Mass for St Symphorian, and a Mass in honour of Saints Samson and Paternus jointly: precisely the saints who feature in the itinerary of the Dol monks.⁶² At Orléans there is a church dedicated to St Samson, and a nearby village, Saint-Père-sur-Loire, has a church dedicated to St Paternus.⁶³ Some other liturgical texts of the tenth century and after also associate Samson and Paternus. The Salisbury Psalter (Salisbury Cathedral MS 180), thought to have been written *ca* 900, has St Paternus, St Melanius, and St Samson, in that order, at the beginning of a list of Breton saints in a litany. The presence of a few pan-Insular and Anglo-Saxon saints at the end of the Breton list suggests that it may have been created in its present form by Breton exiles in Anglo-Saxon England.⁶⁴ In the eleventh-century litany of Limoges from Paris, BN MS lat. 1154, the order is Paternus – Patrick – Samson.⁶⁵ The fact that these litanies put Paternus first, yet class him with Breton and other Celtic saints, may perhaps suggest that St Paternus had taken on a Breton identity that was not merely contingent on a Dol relic grab.

Tracing the link between St Samson and St Paternus of Avranches is complicated by the entry into the equation of two or perhaps three other saints.⁶⁶ The first is St Paternus, bishop of Vannes. An authentic record survives of his ordination at the Council of Vannes between 463 and 492.⁶⁷ The second is St Padarn of Wales, reputed founder of Llanbadarn Fawr in Ceredigion, and the subject *ca* 1200 of a Life in *Vitae Sanctorum Wallensium* (London, BL Cotton Vespasian A.xiv), of whom more in a moment.⁶⁸ The third is a St Paternus who was the eponym and dedicatee of two parishes in Cornwall, North and South Petherwin, which flank the town of Launceston (*Dunheved*). One might, perhaps, suggest that the Cornish Paternus was an avatar of St Paternus of Avranches, particularly if it is argued that *VP* was used by a hagiographer working in Cornwall to create the **Vita primigenia* of Samson. However, it has to be said that the cult evidence for Samson and Paternus in Cornwall is not closely correlated. Doble thought that this Paternus was to be identified with the father of a sixth-century King Constantine of Cornwall, mentioned in a late version

⁶¹ Guillotel, 'Le premier siècle', 76–7.

⁶² Orchard (ed.), *The Sacramentary of Ratoldus*, xxix.

⁶³ Doble, *Saint Patern*, 37.

⁶⁴ This is Duine's opinion (*Inventaire liturgique*, 48); H. Le Bourdellès suggested that the litany was composed by monks of Landévennec resident at Montreuil-sur-Mer in the early tenth century ('Les Bretons à Montreuil-sur-Mer', 46). Bernard Tanguy placed the original compilation of the Salisbury litany in the diocese of Léon and the Limoges litany in Saint-Malo/Alet (Tanguy, 'Anciennes litanies bretonnes'). For the Salisbury text see Warren, 'Un monument'; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies*, 292–3.

⁶⁵ Duine, *Inventaire liturgique*, 59.

⁶⁶ Not counting the St Paternus, monk and martyr at Sens in the eighth century (see below, n.81), or the St Paternus found in a *Vita* from St Vaast, Arras dating from 1040–1081, mentioned without further details by Duine, *Inventaire liturgique*, 59: these require further investigation.

⁶⁷ Munier (ed.), *Concilia Galliae*, 150–8.

⁶⁸ Wade-Evans (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum*, 252–69; Howlett & Thomas, 'Vita Sancti Paterni'.

of the *Vita Sancti Turiavi* from Clermont (BHL 8342d).⁶⁹ But, given that St Turiiau also was a Dol saint, a ‘leakage’ of the name of Paternus into this *Vita* by way of the connection between St Paternus and St Samson is not impossible.

The traditions of St Paternus of Vannes and St Padarn of Wales, and the influence on both of the cult of St Paternus of Avranches, present an interesting historical problem. It seems clear that the Welsh St Padarn, founder of Llanbadarn Fawr in Ceredigion, was a saint with a historic existence manifested in local traditions about his career and burial. However, his twelfth-century Life, preserved in the *Vitae Sanctorum Wallensium* manuscript of ca 1200, seems to be based partly on a Life of St Paternus of Vannes, itself no longer extant.⁷⁰ It gives St Padarn a Breton origin and alleges that he travelled from Brittany to Wales, where he founded several monasteries, appointing Samson as head of one of them. Later, the Life continues, a British king, Caradoc Brech-Bras, conquered Brittany, and the Bretons made it a condition of accepting his rule that he return St Padarn to them. St Padarn thus became bishop of Vannes. After an altercation, St Samson of Dol confirmed the immunity of Vannes from his archiepiscopal *census*. When Padarn died he was initially buried in a *civitas apud Francos*. This last detail reveals the influence of the cult of St Paternus of Avranches; this, it seems, had been used at Vannes to help create a Life and cult of Paternus of Vannes, which in turn was incorporated into the Life of Padarn of Wales. All three saints have the same feast day, which originally belonged to Paternus of Avranches.⁷¹ In the *Bonedd y Saint* genealogical tract from early thirteenth-century Wales, St Padarn of Llanbadarn is likewise given Breton ancestry, his grandfather being ‘Emyr Llydaw’ (‘the emperor of Brittany’).⁷²

There have been various theories as to when and why Padarn of Wales came to be identified with Continental saints named Paternus.⁷³ I suggest that it happened after the Norman Conquest and was associated with the Welsh rediscovery of St Samson.⁷⁴ The First Life of St Samson was obtained and used by the clergy of both Llandaff and St Davids in the early twelfth century to support their churches’ claims to antiquity and archiepiscopal status. The Life of St Paternus of Vannes expressed resistance to the archiepiscopal claims of Dol (embodied by Samson) in Brittany; the Life of Padarn of Llanbadarn placed this resistance in a Welsh context.⁷⁵ The acceptance of a Breton ancestry for Padarn and other saints in the Welsh genealogies, and the acceptance of a Welsh dimension for St Paternus at Vannes by ca 1200, could be seen to stem from this initial, politically motivated identification. The association of Padarn with Samson was all the more natural, given the liturgical connection that

⁶⁹ Doble, *Saint Patern*, 41–2; for the *Vita Turiavi* see Poulin, *L’hagiographie bretonne*, 363–7 (the reference in the text above is to the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*).

⁷⁰ Notes in other documents suggest that a *Vita* existed at Vannes by ca 1200: Doble, *Saint Patern*, 26.

⁷¹ Doble, *Saint Patern*, 18, 32. A widespread cult in the Vannetais of St Julitta – which was the name of the mother of St Paternus of Avranches as well as of a more famous martyr – may suggest that St Paternus of Vannes was appropriating aspects of the identity of Paternus of Avranches earlier: see Vallerie, ‘La mère de saint Patern’.

⁷² Doble, *Saint Patern*, 23, 18–19.

⁷³ For discussion of the various possible relationships between the Lives of Paternus of Vannes and Padarn of Wales see Doble, *Saint Patern*, 16–32; Howlett & Thomas, ‘Vita Sancti Paterni’, 76; Duine, *La métropole de Bretagne*, 33–5, 56–9; Lot, ‘Caradoc et S. Patern’; Bourguès, ‘La production hagiographique’ (online, consulted 23 March 2016).

⁷⁴ For Samson’s earlier cult in Wales see Jankulak, ‘The absent saint’, and her study below.

⁷⁵ For the use of Breton hagiography in post-Conquest Welsh hagiography, see Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 109–31; Marquand, ‘Le milieu politique’.

already existed between Samson and Paternus of Avranches. Given the thorough mixing of three originally distinct saints that had taken place by the central middle ages, it seems pointless to inquire which of them – if any – was the original eponym of three places in western Brittany with Paternus names – Lambader in Plouvorn, Lanbader in Plabennec, and Saint-Patern near Guingamp.⁷⁶

The borrowings from *VP* in *VIS*, in short, allow the suggestion to be made that the association seen between these two saints from the tenth century onwards may in fact be traceable right back to the composition of the **Vita primigenia* and possibly to the lifetimes of the saints themselves. But it was an association that had added ramifications from the eleventh century onwards, giving the cult of St Paternus of Avranches new associations in Brittany and Wales.

Manuscripts and transmission

I have left a discussion of the manuscript-history of *VIS* and *VP* until last because it is not as much help as it might be in illustrating the relationship between the two texts. However, it is worth discussing the manuscript-history briefly because it underlines the impression given by the cult-evidence that the cult of St Paternus began earlier than that of St Samson, under more promising auspices, but was eventually overtaken by it.

The surviving manuscripts are not really representative of the early medieval circulation of the texts. As we have seen, a text of *VP* must have been available to St Samson's hagiographers in the seventh through to the ninth centuries; it was also available to the ninth-century hagiographers of St Malo and St Melanious of Rennes, and apparently to the creators of a Life of St Paternus of Vannes in the twelfth century.⁷⁷ One might also have expected the association between the relics and liturgy of SS. Samson and Paternus from at least the early tenth century onwards to have led to the same institutions acquiring manuscripts of both their Lives. Yet the text-histories of the two works seem to be quite separate, as are also those of other early Breton saints. The earliest manuscripts of *VP* are two of the earliest-surviving hagiographical collections, or *legendaries*: Montpellier, faculté de Médecine codex 55, from the late eighth century, and Vienna, National Library 420, late eighth to early ninth century. They both show a precocious assimilation of *VP* to hagiography of general interest, particularly the Montpellier manuscript, which has an Autun provenance, while the Vienna manuscript (formerly at Salzburg), in which saints of north-west France predominate, has been suggested to be a Saint-Amand collection taken to Salzburg by Archbishop Arno (*ca* 750–821), who originated there. But *VP* appears to have been included in this collection as an afterthought, since it breaks up the calendar sequence of saints.⁷⁸ Two more recent manuscripts, Dublin, Trinity College Dublin MS 174 and London, BL Cotton Vitellius D.xvii, may be more easily connected with the spread of St Paternus's cult.⁷⁹ The Trinity College manuscript is a *legendary* from the second half of the eleventh century with a Salisbury provenance,

⁷⁶ Largillière and Doble thought that these places must have been named after another, otherwise unknown British saint: Doble, *Saint Patern*, 39.

⁷⁷ Doble, *Saint Patern*, 3–6, 24–33; Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 159, 244.

⁷⁸ Moretus, 'Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum', 251–2; Vielhaber, 'De codice hagiographico', 36. Lifshitz, *The Norman Conquest*, 33, notes that the *Vita Paterni* had no impact on later Norman hagiography, but does not mention its influence in Brittany.

⁷⁹ Grosjean, 'Catalogus', 88–91; Colker, *Trinity College Library Dublin*, 320–30.

and may be connected with St Paternus's appearance in the litany from the tenth-century Salisbury Psalter (Salisbury Cathedral MS 180).⁸⁰ The Cotton manuscript, which was damaged almost beyond recognition in the fire of 1731, was a detached portion of Oxford, Bodl. Libr. Bodley MS 852, an eleventh-century manuscript from Jumièges which was sent to Malmesbury and used by William of Malmesbury for his resumé of the life of Paternus in *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*.⁸¹ Copying at Jumièges suggests dissemination via St Paternus's cult centres in Normandy, possibly with the help of St Samson's foundation at Pental. Only in the thirteenth century does a strictly local manuscript appear, Avranches, Bibl. Mun. d'Avranches MS 168, from Mont-Saint-Michel – belated evidence that the abbey which had taken over the former monastery of Saint-Pair also possessed a copy of the saint's Life. In the fifteenth century a number of other Lives were added to the manuscript, including a short Life of St Samson and Lives of Malo (Machutes) and Melanious.⁸² At last, someone was making a collection of local-interest hagiography; a study of this manuscript, the date and reasons for its assembly, and the nature of the texts it contains, would be interesting.

Meanwhile *VIS* took longer to achieve a wide circulation. It was clearly available at Dol itself in the ninth century and continued to be in the early twelfth, when rewritten versions were produced. It was also drawn upon by numerous Breton hagiographers in the ninth century and thereafter.⁸³ In the 1130s, at the latest, it had become known in south Wales where its information was drawn on in local hagiography, and an abridged version was copied into the Book of Llandaff. The point of contact may have been Withenoc and his successors, vassals of the seigneurs of Dol-Combour, and lords of Monmouth from *ca* 1071.⁸⁴ On the Continent, the notoriety of Dol's bid for archiepiscopal status ensured a circulation of the two rival versions of Samson's *Vita*, although the *Vita secunda* seems to have fallen out of use once the archiepiscopal claim was finally defeated in 1199.⁸⁵ *VIS* was diffused via Normandy – like *VP*, but not in the same manuscripts – as hinted by the Saint-Ouen provenance of the earliest surviving manuscript, Flobert's 'B' (Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine MS 1708, s.x/xi) and the Jumièges/Fécamp provenance of four of the more recent ones (N, O, P and R; P early twelfth century, the rest thirteenth century). As well as the manuscripts, there is evidence for knowledge of *VIS* in the eleventh-century Life of St Vigor of Bayeux from Cérisy-la-Forêt, which reproduces St Samson's most popular miracle, the expulsion of a dragon from a cave, with a

⁸⁰ Ker, *Catalogue*, 143.

⁸¹ Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 79–80. Thomson cites N.R. Ker's convincing identification of the damaged Cotton manuscript as containing the missing Lives of St Paternus and Aelfheah from the fourteenth-century contents list of Bodleian Library MS Bodley 852 – but it is curious that the contents list calls the Life of St Paternus *passio sancti Paterni episcopi et martyris*. Fortunatus's *VP* makes it clear that the saint was not a martyr. There is, however, a *passio* of a St Paternus, monk and martyr, of Sens in the eighth century (*BHL* 6479), known only from an early edition in Mabillon's *Acta Sanctorum*: D'Achéry & Mabillon (edd.), *Passio Sancti Paterni* (online edition consulted 28 October 2015).

⁸² *Catalogue général*, 86–8. The text of *VP* in this manuscript is not complete: it lacks the preface and ends with 'ut ex hoc crederetur recepisse luminaria magis mentis quam corporis'.

⁸³ Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 79–80, 83–4, 128–31, 161, 280, 421.

⁸⁴ Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 109–31; Guillotel, 'Une famille bretonne'.

⁸⁵ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 43–53.

closely similar narrative, though with no exact verbal borrowings.⁸⁶ There may be more similar evidence waiting to be discovered in an exhaustive trawl through the region's hagiography; but the real coup for *VIS* was its acceptance into the official Cistercian legendary, the *Liber de nataliciis*, in the twelfth century.⁸⁷ The Life of St Paternus did not achieve this distinction.

The Life of St Paternus is an object lesson in how a saint's Life, even one that was early and authentic with a prestigious author, could almost fall out of circulation if there were not a well-established cult centre and, preferably, important patrons promoting the saint and his relics as an object of veneration and pilgrimage. Collective memory was much interrupted at and around Avranches. As regards the see of Avranches, after Ragentramnus in *ca* 680, the only bishop heard of before the mid-ninth century is Aubert, the alleged founder of Mont-Saint-Michel, and the sources regarding him are late and so untrustworthy that his dates and even his historicity are disputed. Three bishops from the mid-ninth century are known from charters, conciliar records, and hagiography, but after Walbertus in 859–62 there is again silence until the 990s.⁸⁸ The fact that the list of bishops drawn up by Robert de Torigny in the twelfth century is full of gaps and, even for the early period, substitutes local saints for genuine bishops, underlines the failure of institutional continuity. It would be easy to put the blame for this on the Vikings, but secularization and the breakdown of central control in both Church and kingdom in the late seventh and eighth centuries, and again in the tenth, are equally likely to be responsible.⁸⁹ In the case of Saint-Pair-sur-Mer, generally identified as St Paternus's foundation of Sciscy, there is no evidence for the monastery's existence between the writing of *VP* and the grant of *abbatia Sancti Paterni* to Mont-Saint-Michel in the 1020s; the wording of the charter need not necessarily mean that there was an active monastic community there at the time, only that it was remembered as a monastic site.⁹⁰ The monks of Mont-Saint-Michel who ended up in charge of St Paternus's cult (and one of his fingers) did not do much to promote it, given the much greater importance of their dual cult of the Archangel Michael and St Aubert.⁹¹

Far more exploration could be undertaken of the fortunes of the cults and relics of these two saints, but to conclude I shall return to the early middle ages and explain my opening analogy of the hare and the tortoise. The comparison between the Lives of St Samson and St Paternus shows two saints who set out as very similar religious figures at a pioneering moment for the Merovingian and Breton churches. The 'hare' was St Paternus, commemorated in an early *Vita* as an ascetic bishop from the old Gaulish aristocracy; the 'tortoise' was St Samson, who had to wait

⁸⁶ Howe, 'The date', 311; *Vita Sancti Vigoris*, edd. De Smedt *et al.*, 300–1 (online edition consulted 30 September 2015). It is interesting that a Bayeux saint was credited with one of St Samson's miracles, given that the clergy of Bayeux are said to be among those who fled the Vikings in company with the clergy of Dol in *Translatio Sancti Maglorii*: see above, nn.57–8. The relics of another Bayeux saint, St Exuperius, spent time in Brittany, having apparently been translated to Gahard in the Rennais some time in the ninth century before being installed at Corbeil by Count Haimo of Paris in the 920s–40s: Guillotel, 'L'exode', 181–3.

⁸⁷ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 43–53; Poulin, '*Liber iste vocatur Vita Sansonis*'.

⁸⁸ Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux*, II.225; Allen, 'Five charters'.

⁸⁹ É. Van Tourhoudt, 'La mobilité', 24, suggests as an alternative that Avranches and Coutances, the two most westerly sees of the archdiocese of Rouen, may have been deprived of resident bishops from the late seventh to the early ninth centuries by the centralising tendencies of the archbishops of Rouen.

⁹⁰ Potts, 'When the saints go marching', 27.

⁹¹ According to an inventory of 1398, ed. Dubois, '*Le trésor des reliques*', 530–1.

longer for a *Vita*, but as a result was commemorated in the newer style of a seventh-century Columbanian monastic founder, with an ample, royal-granted estate. How exactly the church of St Samson came to acquire Pental we may never know, but the acquisition may have been crucial both to the need and to the ability to compose a Life of the founding saint, and later to promote Dol as a credible archiepiscopal see. Dol gained from its 'leap forward' into the Neustrian heartland, while St Paternus's main churches, Saint-Pair and Avranches, were disadvantaged by the withdrawal of royal power from the west in the late seventh and eighth centuries. St Samson had a higher profile during the middle ages as a result. But St Paternus's association with St Samson led to a 'second career' for him, influencing the development of the cults of other Breton, Welsh, and Cornish saints.

COLUMBANUS, THE BRITONS,
AND THE MEROVINGIAN CHURCH¹

Ian N. Wood

The history of British saints on the Continent is notoriously difficult to research – and I deliberately use the word ‘British’ and ‘Briton’ even where others might prefer ‘Breton’, because for the sixth century it is usually impossible to make a definite distinction between those who originated in Great Britain and those who came from Brittany. The majority of our sources are late: the most substantial body of material is hagiographic, but the *Vita Winwaloei* was written by Wrdestin and Clement in the first years of the ninth century,² that of Machutus (Malo) by Bili around 860,³ and that of Paul Aurelian by Wrmonoc in 884.⁴ Of the two Lives of Gildas, the earliest appears to belong to the eleventh century, and the second, by Caradoc of Llancarfan, to the twelfth.⁵ The first *Life of Samson (VIS)* would seem to have been composed initially during the seventh century, which is when the author himself claims to have been active, and there are certain linguistic and terminological features in the Life that support such a date.⁶ There may, of course, have been a subsequent moment of what French scholars are now describing as *réécriture*,⁷ but even so the fact that the text makes no mention of a diocese of Dol surely indicates that the work as we have it antedates the foundation of the see, whose existence is not clearly attested before the mid-ninth century.⁸

For Samson, unlike Gildas, Paul Aurelian, Winwaloe (Gwennoelé), and Malo, we at least have the evidence of the subscription list of the Council of Paris, which can be dated by means of the other signatories to the period 556 to 573.⁹ The Council provides us with a useful point of departure for considering the activities

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² Ed. de Smedt, ‘*Vita S. Winwaloei*’.

³ Ed. Le Duc, *Vie de Saint-Malo*.

⁴ Ed. Cuissard, ‘*Vie de Saint Paul de Léon*’.

⁵ Williams (ed.), *Two Lives of Gildas*.

⁶ Flobert (ed.), *La Vie ancienne de saint Samson de Dol*. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 625.

⁷ Goullet et al. (edd.), *L’hagiographie mérovingienne*; Poulin, ‘La “*Vie ancienne*” de saint Samson de Dol comme *réécriture*’.

⁸ Smith, *Province and Empire*, 15.

⁹ Gaudemet & Basdevant (edd.), *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens*, II.410–25.

of British ascetics in the Merovingian world. Having considered the early evidence for Samson, I will turn to that relating to the Irish saint Columbanus, which arguably gives us our most extensive block of dateable evidence for the influence of Britons on the Continent, before returning to what the *Vita Samsonis* has to say about the saint's Continental career, and the ways in which it complements and differs from the Columbanian material.

Samson's is not the only British name to appear at the end of the canons of Paris: in addition there are Gonothigern of Senlis, and Ferrocinctus of Évreux¹⁰ – the latter being identified as a Briton by Fleuriot, on the grounds that the name looks to be a Latin version of the name Iarnuiscid.¹¹ That a number of members of the Merovingian clergy were of British extraction by the mid-sixth century is confirmed by the legislation of the Council of Tours in 567, where it was decreed that no Briton or Roman (*Britannum aut Romanum*) should be consecrated bishop in *Armorico* without the approval of the metropolitan and his provincials.¹² *Armorica*, one should note, in this period stretched way to the east of Brittany, and might include most of the land between the Seine and the Loire: Jonas himself describes Coutances, on the Cotentin, as being *Armoricana in loca*.¹³ To the evidence of the councils, and looking rather at the lower reaches of the clergy, one can add that of the well-known letter concerning the British priests Lovocat and Cathern,¹⁴ as well as the comments of Gregory of Tours on the priest Winnoc, whose life started well, but degenerated into alcoholism.¹⁵

To return to Samson at the Council of Paris: one needs to ask what his presence indicates about his status. He signed the conciliar acts using the phrase *Samson subscripsi et consensi in nomine Christi*. The fact that he does not employ the word *episcopus* tells us nothing. At least eleven of his fellow signatories at the Council, who do not employ the word, are known to have held episcopal rank.¹⁶ At the same time bishops are not the only clerics to sign the canons of Merovingian councils. Thus, priests and lower clergy sign Arles IV (524), Orléans II (533), Orléans III (538), Orléans IV (541), Orléans V (549), Eauze (551), Lyon II (567–70), Clichy (626–7), and Chalon (647–53),¹⁷ while abbots sign the acts of Orléans IV (541), Orléans V (549), Paris (614), Clichy (626–7), Chalon (647–53), and Bordeaux (662 × 75).¹⁸ Perhaps the most that we can deduce about Samson from his presence at the Council of Paris concerns his learning. As John Reuben Davies has noted, unlike all the other signatures, Samson's is written in a leonine hexameter,¹⁹ which may tell us something about his education, arguably, following the *Vita Prima*, at the school of Illtud at Llantwit Major.²⁰ Later traditions would associate both Paul Aurelian and

¹⁰ Council of Paris III, edd. Gaudemet & Basdevant, II.424–5.

¹¹ Fleuriot, *Les origines de la Bretagne*, 84.

¹² Council of Tours II (567), c.9, ed. Gaudemet & Basdevant, 354–7.

¹³ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, I.21, ed. B. Krusch, 199.

¹⁴ Duchesne, 'Lovocat et Cathern'.

¹⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.21, VIII.34, ed. Krusch & Levison, 229, 403.

¹⁶ Council of Paris III, ed. Gaudemet & Basdevant, 424–5.

¹⁷ Gaudemet & Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens*, I.142–3, 206–7, 260–3, 292–5, 324–7, 336–7; II.408–9, 546–7, 562–3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.292–3, 324–5; II.524–5, 546–7, 562–3, 572–3.

¹⁹ Davies, 'The saints of South Wales', 381.

²⁰ *VIS*, I.7, 9–14, ed. Flobert, 156–7, 160–71.

Gildas with the same school, although David Breeze has argued that the latter should also be seen as having attended the schools of Cirencester.²¹

It is worth pausing a little longer on the Council of Paris. The list of identifiable bishops is curious: it allows us to date the gathering to the years 556 to 573. The sees represented form an interesting list: Bourges, Rouen, Bordeaux, Paris, Tours, Nantes, Angers, Senlis, Avranches, Bayeux, Chartres, Évreux, and finally Lisieux. This does not coincide with the boundaries of any Merovingian kingdom in that period, except for the years 558–61, when Chlothar I was the sole surviving son of Clovis.²² Yet it is difficult to square the tone of the council with Chlothar's reign. The opening canon, while polite about royal power, also challenges it: this would scarcely have been acceptable to a well- and long-established king.²³ On the other hand, the collection of bishops fits neither with the kingdom of Charibert (561–7), who never controlled Bourges, nor with that of Chilperic I (561–84), who took over much of his brother's Armorican territory after his death.

It is, however, worth looking closely at one sentence in the first canon: 'Neque quisdam per interregna res Dei defensare nitatur, quia Dei potentia cunctorum regnorum terminos singulari dominatione concludit.' The phrase was translated by Brigitte Basdevant in the French edition: 'Et que personne ne tente de revendiquer les biens de Dieu en se réclamant des partages entre royaumes, car la puissance de Dieu embrasse sous son unique domination tous les royaumes.' ('And no one should try to claim the property of God by citing the divisions between the kingdoms, because the power of God embraces all kingdoms under its sole authority.') This translation seems to me to pay too little attention to the words *per interregna*, which do not have to mean 'divisions between the kingdoms'. More likely is, surely, the natural reading 'in the course of the *interregna*'. Although there was no break in royal rule following the death of Chlothar I, we do know that there was considerable conflict between his sons, at the end of which the youngest, Chilperic, who had hoped for better, ended up with the smallest portion.²⁴ If we take the phrase *per interregna* to refer to this period of conflict, we may perhaps understand how a group of bishops who would not end up in the same kingdom came together. We can also understand their anxiety about the current state of discord, which was endangering ecclesiastical property. In other words the internal evidence seems to me to suggest that the Council of Paris was held during the months following Chlothar's death, when the precise shape of the Merovingian *Teilreiche*, as they are often called, was still in question. We can probably, therefore, accept Basdevant's preferred date of 561.²⁵

Samson, then, would seem to have been a figure of enough stature in 561 to have joined a gathering of bishops and senior clergy. Between them they represented a substantial band of territory lying just to the east of what would later become Brittany. This much one can deduce from the sixth-century evidence. The other piece of information relating to Samson that dates to the sixth century is the probability

²¹ Breeze, 'Gildas and the schools of Cirencester', 131–9.

²² For the geography of the Merovingian kingdoms see the maps at menestrel.fr (Production d'une cartographie des mondes médiévaux: ressources: territoires).

²³ Council of Paris III, c.1, ed. Gaudemet & Basdevant, 412–17.

²⁴ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 59.

²⁵ Gaudemet & Basdevant (edd.), *Les canons de conciles mérovingiens*, II.410; Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich*, 122–6; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 66, who argues for 561–2 or 567–73.

that the Merovingian King Chilperic named one of his sons after the saint.²⁶ Some have questioned the point, and argued that the prince was more probably named after the Old Testament hero. This, it must be said, is in the highest degree unlikely. One of the key features of the Merovingians was their long hair, which they lost only when deposed and placed in ecclesiastical confinement. A central feature of the history of the Old Testament Samson was the fact that his lover, Delilah, cut his hair and blinded him. A Merovingian could scarcely have been named after him: even a Merovingian destined for the Church would scarcely have wished to be associated with the fate of the biblical Samson.

Any further discussion of the Continental history of the British Samson has, necessarily, to turn to the evidence of the *Vita*, with all its associated problems. Before considering some of these, it is useful to turn instead to the Irish saint Columbanus, for whom the evidence is very much more secure, and who does shed some important light on the position of Britons on the Continent, both in the generations after Samson and, arguably, during Samson's own lifetime.

As Bernard Merdrignac noted, the earliest relatively extensive evidence for Britons on the Continent is to be found in the documentation relating to Columbanus.²⁷ Most important here is the *Vita Columbani*, written by Jonas of Bobbio in 642/43, but there are also passing references in Columbanus's own letters which provide some additional details.

According to Jonas, Columbanus arrived on the Continent in a region which he called the *sinus Britannicus*, and he remained there for a little while before entering the *arva Gallica*: all this supposedly happened in the days of Sigibert I, who was murdered in 575.²⁸ In fact we can be sure that Columbanus reached Gaul in or a little before 590, for in a letter written in 603/4 he said that he had been living in the forested country of the Luxeuil region for twelve years,²⁹ while Jonas noted that the saint had spent twenty years in the Vosges before he was driven out of Luxeuil in 610.³⁰ Columbanus, however, may well have reached the Continent shortly before 590. Jonas says that he spent a little time, *paulisper*, in the *sinus Britannicus*, before moving to Burgundy.³¹ The word may imply months or even a few years, rather than days or weeks. Jonas uses the same word to describe the amount of time that Columbanus intended to spend in Bregenz, following his forced departure from Burgundy,³² which was certainly a significant spell of time.

What, then, was the *sinus Britannicus*? Many scholars have accepted the traditional identification of the site of Columbanus's arrival with the coast near Alet, and more particularly with the parish of Saint-Coulomb, although there is no evidence that the dedication is early.³³ In fact Jonas allows us to be reasonably certain about the identification of the region, because he uses the same phrase *sinus Britannicus*,³⁴

²⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.21, ed. Krusch and Levison, 229; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 67.

²⁷ Merdrignac, 'Bretons et Irlandais', 123.

²⁸ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.4–6, ed. Krusch, 158–63.

²⁹ Columbanus, Ep. II.6, ed. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, 16–19.

³⁰ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.20, ed. Krusch, 197.

³¹ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.4, ed. Krusch, 164.

³² Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.27, ed. Krusch, 213.

³³ Merdrignac, 'Bretons et Irlandais', 123. On dedications to Columbanus in Brittany, Bourguès, 'Un saint peu en cacher un autre'.

³⁴ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.21, ed. Krusch, 198.

together with *arva Britannica*,³⁵ when he talks of Theuderic II's attempt to have Columbanus deported in 610. There it is quite clear that the *sinus Britannicus* was close to Nantes. Of course it is perfectly possible that Columbanus made an initial landfall in 590 before transferring to the mouth of the Loire, but since the saint was taken to Nantes to be put on a ship destined for Ireland, there is no need to postulate such an itinerary. That there was direct contact between Ireland and the mouth of the Loire is, in any case, attested by the Life of Filibert, originally composed in the Merovingian period, although the text we have would seem to be a Carolingian *réécriture*.³⁶

The *sinus Britannicus*, then, was a particular region which already by the 590s was specifically associated with Britons. Here we can turn not just to Jonas, but also to Columbanus himself, who, when writing from the region of Nantes to the monks whom he had left behind in Luxeuil, talked of being in the *vicinia Brittonum*.³⁷ It would seem, then, that there was a notable group of Britons somewhere near the Loire mouth in 590.³⁸

Jonas's words repay rather closer attention. When he translated the *Vita Columbani* into French, Dom Adalbert de Vogüé rendered the words *sinus Britannicus* as 'rivages de la Bretagne',³⁹ and in this he was following Louis Gougaud.⁴⁰ *Sinus*, however, does not simply mean any area of 'coast'. In classical Latin first and foremost the word means a cup, and by extension, when used to describe a geographical feature, something that is distinctly round: in other words a 'bay' or a 'gulf'. The *sinus Britannicus*, then, is the 'Gulf of the Britons'. In 1915 Mrs Thomas ConnCanon, in her *Life of St Columban*, identified the site as the Golfe de Morbihan.⁴¹ The identification is remarkably compelling.

It is worth indulging in a little speculation, even if the following argument risks becoming circular. One of the later Lives of Gildas places the saint's final years at Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys.⁴² Of course the other, more recent Life claims that Gildas spent his last days in or near Glastonbury.⁴³ Perhaps, however, Columbanus's journey to the *sinus Britannicus* strengthens the case for accepting that Gildas did indeed move to the Continent, and more specifically to the Morbihan. Here the Irish saint's attachment to the British monastic legislator may be significant. Columbanus cites Gildas directly as a Church Father on two occasions.⁴⁴ The second of the citations refers to a no-longer-extant letter of Gildas to Vinnian, who was also a figure of significance to the Irish saint, most obviously in the Penitential. And while Donnchadh Ó Corraín has recently questioned whether Columbanus was actually the author of the Penitential ascribed to him, he has affirmed the probability that the Irishman was responsible for its transmission to the Continent.⁴⁵ Turning from Gildas

³⁵ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.20, ed. Krusch, 196.

³⁶ *Vita Filiberti*, 42, ed. Levison, 603; for the date, Gouillet *et al.* (edd.), *L'hagiographie mérovingienne*, 78.

³⁷ Columbanus, Ep. IV.9, ed. Walker, 36–7.

³⁸ Merdrignac, 'Bretons et Irlandais', 124, associates them with Columbanus's arrival on the Continent.

³⁹ de Vogüé (ed.), *Jonas de Bobbio, Vie de saint Colomban*, 109.

⁴⁰ Gougaud, 'Un point obscur', 327.

⁴¹ ConnCanon, *The Life of St Columban*, 299.

⁴² *Vita Gildae auctore monachi Ruiensi*, 16–30, ed. Williams, 37–59.

⁴³ *Vita Gildae auctore Caradoco Lancarbanensi*, 10–14, ed. Williams, 98–103.

⁴⁴ Columbanus, Ep. I.6–7, ed. Walker, 8–9. Sharpe, 'Gildas as a Father of the Church'.

⁴⁵ Ó Corraín, 'Columbanus and his countrymen'.

to Vinnian, who is now regarded as being British rather than Irish, Ó Corraín has suggested that parts of his Penitential at least are likely to have been written with a British rather than an Irish audience in mind. If we combine these suggestions with the further arguments that the name Ninnian is a mistaken rendering of Vinnian⁴⁶ and recall the traditional association of Ninnian with Whithorn, we may note the proximity of Whithorn and Bangor. Although separated by the North Channel of the Irish Sea, the two monastic sites were close enough to have influenced each other. One might even ask whether Ninnian's Cave, which presumably served as a retreat for the British saint, was a source of inspiration for Columbanus, who established equivalent retreats in both the Vosges and the Apennines.⁴⁷ Following Peter Hill's argument that Whithorn was initially a Pelagian foundation,⁴⁸ established by a group who had suffered persecution in the 420s, we might also ask whether Whithorn was the source of Pelagian thought that has been detected in Columbanus's first letters.⁴⁹

There is, in other words, a series of fragments that might explain why Columbanus, from Bangor, should have headed for the Morbihan. None of the fragments on its own amounts to much, but taken together they may suggest that the Irish saint set out for the Loire mouth, and specifically for the Morbihan, because of its association with Gildas, who, if he did migrate to the Continent, probably did so at some point after 536–37, following David Woods's identification of the mysterious cloud mentioned in the *De Excidio* as being related to what appears to have been an eruption of Krakatoa at that time.⁵⁰ Even if one denies that Gildas ever left Britain, the community near the mouth of the Loire may have been established by followers.

If we place Columbanus in the Morbihan in 590 a further piece of information comes into play: the account given by Gregory of Tours of the troubles caused by the Britons Waroch and his son Canao in the region of Rennes and Nantes.⁵¹ According to Gregory, Guntram sent an army under the leadership of Bepollen and Ebrachar to deal with the problem. Initially Ebrachar did nothing, out of hostility towards Bepollen, who was also the butt of a ruse organised by the Merovingian queen-mother Fredegund, who sent Saxons disguised as Britons to kill him. With Bepollen out of the way, Ebrachar attacked Waroch, catching him as he tried to escape to the coastal islands, apparently those off the Morbihan. As a result the British leader swore fealty to Guntram, and sent his nephew as hostage – not that this would prevent him from causing further trouble. Ebrachar then turned on bishop Regalis of Vannes, who excused his behaviour as having been determined by the Britons. Having established some sort of peace, Ebrachar returned to Burgundy.

Although Gregory of Tours makes no mention of Columbanus in any of his works, here we seem to have some insight into the context in which the Irish saint moved from the *sinus Britannicus* to the Vosges, which must have taken place at almost exactly the moment that Ebrachar returned to Burgundy. That Waroch may have had some association with St-Gildas-de-Rhuys is suggested by his presence in an obviously legendary section of the *Vita Gildae*.⁵² Did Columbanus follow the

⁴⁶ Clancy, 'The real St Ninian'.

⁴⁷ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, 1.8–9, ed. Krusch, 166–9; *Miracula sancti Columbani*, 2–3, ed. Dubreucq & Zironi, 10–17.

⁴⁸ Hill, 'Whithorn'.

⁴⁹ Bonner, 'Columbanus, identity, and the writings of Pelagius'.

⁵⁰ Woods, 'Gildas and the mystery cloud of 536–7'.

⁵¹ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, X.9, ed. Krusch & Levison, 491–4. On Waroch and his family, Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 63–4, 68–71.

⁵² *Vita Gildae auctore monacho Ruiensi*, 20–6, ed. Williams, 44–53.

Frankish army back east? More generally, the fact that Guntram controlled the mouth of the Loire surely explains why Columbanus ended up in the region of Luxeuil, rather than in the north or north-west of Francia.

Having dealt with the history of Waroch, Gregory then relates the strange story of Chundo, a royal chamberlain, who was accused of having illegally killed an aurochs in the Vosges, and was subjected to ordeal by battle, as a result of which he was executed – a judgment that Guntram supposedly bitterly regretted. The story is well known because of its significance for the history of ordeal by battle.⁵³ Its exact significance in the structure of Gregory's *Histories* is unclear. It becomes particularly intriguing, however, when one considers that Columbanus, having been in the region of Vannes at the time of Waroch's actions, moved to the Vosges at about the same time as Chundo's crime and execution. The coincidence seems odd: Gregory's narrative seems to echo the movement of the Irish saint, even though he makes no mention of him. One might even be tempted to think that, having been forced to follow Ebrachar to the royal court, Columbanus was then granted the site of his initial settlement, at Annegray in the Vosges, in the context of Guntram's regret over the execution of Chundo.

With regard to the history of British ascetics in the Frankish world, the most important point is that Columbanus associated the area where he first spent time on the Continent, somewhere near mouth of the Loire, with the Britons: as we have seen, he talks about *vicinia Brittonum*. Even if one does not accept the later tradition that Gildas retreated to the Morbihan, it is clear that there was a significant British presence to the west of Nantes.

It may be that this background is of some importance when we consider the Britons in the *Vita Columbani*. According to Jonas, when Theuderic drove Columbanus out of Luxeuil, the king permitted his compatriots, together with those who had accompanied him from the *arva Britannica*, to leave at the same time: 'nequaquam hinc se sequi alios permissuros, nisi eos quos sui ortus terra dederat, vel qui e Brittanica arva ipsum secuti fuerant' ('no one at all was allowed to follow him from there, except those whom the land of his birth had produced, and those who had followed him from the British fields').⁵⁴ In other words, when he initially left the mouth of the Loire for the Vosges Columbanus had been accompanied by British ascetics. Jonas does not name them at the time of their journey eastwards, but in the course of his narrative he mentions individuals who are either known to have been British, or have been so identified, largely on linguistic grounds. Thus Jonas describes Gurgan as *genere Brittonum*,⁵⁵ while Autiernus has been seen as British on account of his name.⁵⁶ Another potential Briton who was exiled with Columbanus is Potentinus, who subsequently established himself on the Cotentin.⁵⁷ In the passage where he talks of Gurgan, Jonas also refers to 'Comininum et Eunocum et Equonanum ex Scottorum genere'.⁵⁸ Despite the description of them as Irish, François Kerlouégan, following Léon Fleuriot, thought that Comininus and Eunocus were both likely to

⁵³ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, X.10, ed. Krusch & Levison, 494. Wood, 'Disputes', 18.

⁵⁴ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.20, ed. Krusch, 196.

⁵⁵ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.13, ed. Krusch, 174.

⁵⁶ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.11, ed. Krusch, 170–1. Kerlouégan, 'Présence et culte', 193.

⁵⁷ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.21, ed. Krusch, 199.

⁵⁸ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.13, ed. Krusch, 174.

have been Britons.⁵⁹ They might, therefore, further illustrate the general point that Columbanus had British companions when he moved to the Vosges.

For our discussion there are three figures mentioned by Jonas who are either more problematic or more interesting. The first two, Winioc and his son Bobolenus, have often been regarded as Britons,⁶⁰ on account of Winioc's name. Certainly the Winnoc who appears in Gregory of Tours was a Briton.⁶¹ Wolfgang Haubrichs, however, has argued that the name Winioc is just as likely to be Germanic.⁶² Like Autiernus and Gurgan, Winioc was one of Columbanus's earliest disciples at Luxeuil, but unlike the other two, he had a son, Bobolenus, who would become the fourth abbot of Bobbio,⁶³ Columbanus's great Italian foundation. This Bobolenus is a problem for the identification of Winioc as a Briton. According to the *Versus de Bobuleno abbate*, a poem written in praise of the abbot perhaps at the end of the Merovingian period, or in the early Carolingian period, Bobolenus had been taught by Columbanus, *edoctus*,⁶⁴ in other words he had been a member of the Luxeuil community before the exile of the Irish saint in 610. He would succeed Bertulf as abbot of Bobbio in 639. We do not know when he died, but a death date of *ca* 654 has been suggested.⁶⁵ An alternative suggestion is that he should be identified with the Bobolenus who wrote the Life of Germanus of Grandval, a Burgundian abbot who was murdered in *ca* 675.⁶⁶ This suggestion, however, is problematic. Were he to have written the *Vita*, the abbot of Bobbio would have been well over seventy at the time. Moreover, the author describes himself as *exiguus omnium presbyterum*, which seems excessively humble for an abbot, and especially for one who presided over a house in a different country.⁶⁷ In addition, the *Versus de Bobuleno* talks of the abbot as being *Atticorum ex genere oriundus nobili*, 'born of a noble family of the Attici'.⁶⁸ Clearly the use of the word *Atticus* is classicising, but, as Haubrichs has suggested, it might be a version of *Chattuarius*, a member of the *Chattuarii*, one of the peoples who made up the confederation of the Franks. Indeed Haubrichs has identified the names of Winioc and Bobolenus, which he sees as a Germano-Roman hybrid, as conforming to the same pattern as others in the Saône-Rhône-Meuse-Rhine region. In other words, the evidence for Winioc and Bobolenus points to them being natives of eastern Francia. One might guess that Columbanus became acquainted with Winioc at the Burgundian or Austrasian court, and that father and son subsequently joined the community at Luxeuil.

We are on much safer ground when we turn to one further figure in the *Vita Columbani*, Carantoc, whose name is a very much more certain indication that he was British. As abbot of Salicis, perhaps to be identified as Saulx, to the south of Annegray, or as Montesaux, to the south-west of Luxeuil,⁶⁹ Carantoc was already well established in the region of the Vosges before the arrival of Columbanus, and

⁵⁹ Kerlouégan, 'Présence et culte', 193.

⁶⁰ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.15, 17, ed. Krusch, 177–8, 182–3. Kerlouégan, 'Présence et culte', 192.

⁶¹ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.21, ed. Krusch and Levison, 229.

⁶² W. Haubrichs, personal communication.

⁶³ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.15, ed. Krusch, 177–8.

⁶⁴ *Versus de Bobuleno abbate*, ed. Krusch, 154.

⁶⁵ Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, 62–7.

⁶⁶ Gaillard, 'Les vitae des saintes Sadalberge et Anstrude de Laon', 657; Fox, *Power and Religion*, 189–90.

⁶⁷ Bobolenus, *Vita Germani Grandivallensis*, Pref., ed. Krusch, 33.

⁶⁸ *Versus de Bobuleno abbate*, ed. Krusch, 154.

⁶⁹ *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum*, ed. Krusch, 165, n.1.

he was able to supply the community at Annegray with provisions, when it was on the verge of starvation.⁷⁰ Salicis itself was not a wholly British foundation, for we hear that Carantoc's agent was called Marculf, which suggests that he was a Frank. On the other hand, it would seem very likely that Carantoc was accompanied by compatriots when he first arrived in the Vosges. In other words, his community may not have been very different in origin from that of Columbanus, and whether or not he originated in Britain or Brittany, one may wonder whether he too had passed through the region to the west of Nantes.

There is one further piece of evidence that may tell us something about Columbanus's links with Britons. Bede's sole reference to Columbanus comes in an extract from a letter written by archbishop Laurentius of Canterbury, and bishops Mellitus of the East Saxons and Justus of Rochester, to the bishops of the Irish Church. According to the archbishop, he had learnt from the Irish bishop Dagan, when he visited Anglo-Saxon territory, and from the abbot Columbanus, that the Irish and the British followed the same heretical practices.⁷¹ Exactly where Laurentius or his colleagues had come across Columbanus is unknown: it could have been while travelling to or from Rome, or it could have been on a visit to the Frankish court, though Bede implies that it was soon after the Irish saint's arrival in Gaul, for in the archbishop's letter he is described as 'Columbanum abbatem in Gallis venientem' ('abbot Columbanus arriving in Gaul') – which is actually difficult to square with the chronology of Laurentius's presence south of the Channel. Whatever the circumstances, it would seem that Columbanus was happy to associate himself with Britons and their version of christianity, possibly at some point shortly after Laurentius's elevation as archbishop in 604.

To this we may be able to add the later evidence of the Life of Malo, where the hagiographer, Bili, states that the British saint visited Luxeuil.⁷² The text comes from the second half of the ninth century, and the story may have no basis in fact – and Kerlouégan suggested that it was inspired by the dedication of Saint-Colomb.⁷³ Indeed, there may have been some link between the place-name and the anecdote as related by Bili, though it may be, of course, that a visit of Malo to Luxeuil provides an explanation for the Breton dedication.

The evidence for Columbanus provides us with important information on a community of Britons to the west of Nantes. With this in mind we can return to Samson, and his arrival on the Continent, or, as the author of the *Vita Prima* has it, in *Europa*, a rare term in the early middle ages, but which the Irish saint also employed.⁷⁴ Having landed, Samson cured the wife and daughter of a man called Privatus, or just possibly of an ordinary layman. Subsequently, guided by God, he discovered the site of Dol, where he established a monastery. As I have already stressed, in the *Vita Prima* it is nowhere described as the seat of a bishop, which is a clear indication that the text was written before the apparently ninth-century foundation of the see. Some time after the establishment of the monastery of Dol,

⁷⁰ Ionas, *Vita Columbani*, I.7, ed. Krusch, 164–6.

⁷¹ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II.4, ed. Colgrave & Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 146–7. Flechner, 'Dagan, Columbanus, and the Gregorian mission'.

⁷² Bili, *Vita Machutis*, I.46, ed. Le Duc, 131 (I am indebted to André-Yves Bourguès for supplying me with the text of the *Vita Machutis*). Merdrignac, 'Bretons et Irlandais', 124; Le Duc, 'La Bretagne', 180; Kerlouégan, 'Présence et culte', 195.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷⁴ *VIS*, I.46–7, 52–3, ed. Flobert, 212–7, 222–5; Columbanus, Ep. I.1; Ep. V.1, ed. Walker, 2–4, 36–7. Judic, 'La notion de l'Europe chez Colomaban'.

Samson became involved in the conflict between the British leaders Commor and Judwal, and he set off to the court of King Childebert in order to intercede for the latter, who had been imprisoned by the Frankish king.⁷⁵ After a brief disagreement with Childebert and his queen (who must be Ultrogotha, although she is not named) the saint secured the release of Judwal. The conflict with Ultrogotha is interesting, because in no other Merovingian source is she depicted as wicked, and there is surely a possibility that the hagiographer has modelled her on Jonas's representation of Brunhild.⁷⁶ Once Judwal had been released, the king granted Samson the site of Pentale, where he established a monastery.⁷⁷

Pentale is named only once in the *Vita Samsonis*,⁷⁸ although it is clearly the same as the monastery established on land provided by the king, from which the saint had driven a dragon,⁷⁹ and which is described by the hagiographer as being *in Romania*,⁸⁰ a description that, in Thomas Charles-Edwards's view, must date to the sixth or seventh century.⁸¹ Thus, it receives much the same attention as does Dol.⁸² There are, however, reasons for thinking that, in the sixth century, Pentale was more important than Dol. To begin, the hagiographer names the benefactor, Childebert: it was thus a royal foundation.⁸³ More suggestive still is its position, on one of the most strategic points overlooking the lower Seine, immediately before it reaches the sea.⁸⁴ Kings do not give away such sites for no reason. Pentale must have been a major foundation, and it, surely, rather than Dol, explains the presence of Samson at the Council of Paris, and perhaps as the figure after whom Chilperic named one of his sons.

At this point it is worth pausing to compare Samson and Columbanus. Both men initially established themselves on the fringes of the Merovingian kingdom. Samson, however, established a community which lasted long after his death, at Dol: Columbanus left no trace of his time spent in the region of the Morbihan – although that may, of course, be because a British community, associated with Gildas, had already been established there. It may be that both saints were drawn into Merovingian politics because of their involvement in local British squabbles. According to his hagiographer, Samson appealed to the court of Childebert on behalf of Judwal. As we have seen, the Merovingian attack on Waroch may provide the context for Columbanus's move to Burgundy. Samson was then given land on the lower Seine to found what must be regarded as a royal monastery. The bequests of Annegray and Luxeuil must have been royal, even though Jonas is keen not to present either monastery as a Merovingian foundation.⁸⁵ Initially, it would seem that Pentale was a very much more prestigious institution than either Annegray or Luxeuil: as we have noted, its site is indicative of its importance. Both Samson and Columbanus would seem to have acted as spiritual advisers of Merovingian royalty.

⁷⁵ *VIS*, I.53–60, ed. Flobert, 224–33.

⁷⁶ *VIS*, I.55, 57, ed. Flobert, 226–9; Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.18–20, 27, 29, ed. Krusch, 186–90, 214, 219–20.

⁷⁷ *VIS*, I.38, ed. Flobert, 202–3.

⁷⁸ *VIS*, I.38, ed. Flobert, 202–3.

⁷⁹ *VIS*, I.58–9, ed. Flobert, 230–3.

⁸⁰ *VIS*, I.60, ed. Flobert, 232–3. Merdrignac, 'La Neustrie/Normandie', 39–43.

⁸¹ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 238–9.

⁸² *VIS*, I.52, 61, ed. Flobert, 222–3, 234–5.

⁸³ *VIS*, I.59, ed. Flobert, 230–3.

⁸⁴ Le Maho, 'Ermitages et monastères bretons', 66–87.

⁸⁵ Wood, 'Jonas, the Merovingians, and Pope Honorius', 106–9.

If Samson and Columbanus, and indeed Pentale and Luxeuil, are so obviously comparable, why were they and their foundations remembered so differently? Here, one must surely look at the reasons for the decline of Pentale, which ended up as no more than a dependency of Dol.⁸⁶ Historians have attributed its failure to the actions of the Vikings on the lower Seine,⁸⁷ and no doubt they may have been a contributory factor. But Pentale must already have been in decline before then. Even the author of the *Vita Samsonis* seems not to have fully appreciated its importance, although the Merovingian sculpture still to be seen in Saint-Samson-de-la-Roque indicates that it continued to flourish in the seventh century.⁸⁸ Obvious factors in its decline are the foundations of Saint-Wandrille and Jumièges. These two neighbouring houses can be seen as Columbanian foundations, in that they were established by members of the court circle that was influenced by Luxeuil.⁸⁹ Nor were they the only so-called Columbanian houses on the lower Seine: less important, but still receiving court support, was the nunnery at Les Andelys.⁹⁰ As a result Pentale must effectively have been eclipsed by houses that were supported by a new network of patrons. By the late seventh century Pentale was no longer spiritually fashionable, by comparison with the new monasteries of the region.

Yet, while Pentale was eclipsed in the seventh century, if we look to the years before the explosion of Columbanian monasticism – which in fact began over a decade after the departure of Columbanus himself from Francia – it must have been a force to be reckoned with. So, indeed, must the British ascetic movement in general, even though it was later overshadowed by that of the Irish, which would seem to have developed out of it.

By integrating the evidence relating to Columbanus into that for Gildas and Samson – and, one might add, for Vinnian/Ninnian⁹¹ – I would suggest that we get a more secure understanding of the presence of British saints on the Continent, and one that does not depend overmuch on the evidence of the hagiography of the ninth century and later. That Gildas himself really did retire to the Continent must remain a hypothesis, but from the evidence of Columbanus it is clear that there were British ascetics in or not far from the Morbihan before 590, and it would seem likely that they represented traditions of asceticism that Gildas and Vinnian had championed, even if the former did not die at Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys. At more or less the same time that Gildas, or his pupils, reached the south-eastern coast of Brittany, Samson settled in the region of Alet, establishing a foundation at Dol. There is nothing in our early sources to suggest that these northern and southern groups were in close contact. Here, one might note a further parallel with Columbanus. Modern scholarship used to describe Irish influence on the Continent as if it were uniform, although there seems to have been no fusion of the traditions of Columbanus and Fursey immediately after the latter's arrival on the Continent – that would occur only a generation later, if it occurred at all.

As in the region round Vannes, so in that round Alet, there were secular Britons (whether or not of Insular origin) who clearly had relations with the British saints, and in the case of Samson drove him to approach the court of Childebert. As a result

⁸⁶ Le Maho, 'Ermitages et monastères bretons', 80–2.

⁸⁷ Flobert, *La vie ancienne de saint Samson de Dol*, 232, n.59.1.

⁸⁸ Le Maho, 'Ermitages et monastères bretons', 67, n.6.

⁸⁹ Fox, *Power and Religion*, 35, 38.

⁹⁰ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, 296–7.

⁹¹ Wood, 'Britain and the Continent', 76–8.

Samson became a figure of some importance in the religious world of Neustria. There is nothing to suggest that Columbanus's move to Burgundy was determined by connections that had previously been established by Gildas, or his disciples, although it is possible that Carantoc's presence in the Vosges is evidence to the contrary. Clearly some Britons had already migrated eastwards before Columbanus arrived in the territory to the west of Nantes. Although Jonas does not say as much, the Irishman's own move eastwards may have had a political context in the aftermath of the campaign of Ebrachar against Waroch.

In this reading, far from marking a new departure in patterns of Insular asceticism, Columbanus was following an established British tradition, and doing so apparently because of the influence of the British Church, notably Gildas and Vinnian/Ninnian, on the community at Bangor. Within Francia itself Columbanus may have been following in the footsteps of Carantoc. More certainly, his career echoed that of Samson. This British context for Columbanus's career, however, was forgotten, overshadowed by a reading of ascetic history which privileged the Irish and their impact on the Continent – ignoring both the achievements of Samson and his contemporaries and also, it should be said, the continuing traditions of Provençal spirituality, which were still very much alive at the time of Columbanus's arrival in the Merovingian world.⁹²

⁹² See O'Hara & Wood, *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast* (forthcoming).

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AND CELTIC LITURGIES:
FROM THE *VITA SAMSONIS* TO THE *RATIO DE CURSUS*

Constant J. Mews

Little is known for certain about how British and Irish monks understood the role of liturgy in the early middle ages, prior to the imposition of reforms in the time of Charlemagne (768–814). Precious insight can be gained, however, through examining two treatises that might seem at first sight to be very different from each other. One is the *Vita Samsonis* (*VIS*), remarkable for its recollection of a saint remembered as travelling initially from south Wales to Ireland and back, and then, via Cornwall, to Brittany. Dated to either the late seventh or the mid-eighth century, it presents Samson as a bishop who attached great importance to his liturgical duties in a tradition that went back to the apostles.¹ The other is the *Ratio de cursu* or *Explanation about the Liturgies*, written perhaps in the mid-eighth century to defend the apostolic authority of both Irish and Gallican liturgies as of equal validity alongside the liturgies of the East, of Milan, and (mentioned only briefly) of those who followed the Rule of Benedict. While Bede portrayed Irish monks as narrowly traditionalist in their way of calculating the date of Easter, the *Life of Samson* and the *Explanation about the Liturgies* identify early British and Irish liturgical practices as deriving from apostolic authority. Comparing these two texts allows us how to see how both British and Irish monks understood their traditions prior to the imposition of Roman liturgical practice in the mid-eighth century and consolidation during the age of Charlemagne. Comparing the *Life* with the *Ratio* also enables us to assess the extent to which the *Life of Samson* records memories going back to the sixth century, transmitted by an unidentified nephew of Samson's cousin Enoch, and projects concerns of a later generation onto the age of Samson.

The Vita Samsonis

Of particular significance in the *Vita Samsonis* is its account of how, prior to being consecrated a bishop by Dubricius and two other British bishops, Samson had a

¹ There is debate about the date of *VIS*. While it is assigned to the seventh century by Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 23, 238–9, Flobert assigns it to the mid-eighth century, *La Vie ancienne*, 110–11, a date also defended by Poulin, 'La vie ancienne', 257–8, and in this volume.

vision of three martyrs, Peter, James, and John, each with an episcopal crown.² This passage emphasises the canonical status of Samson's consecration, as approved by the apostolic founders of the churches of Rome, Jerusalem, and Ephesus, who together symbolised the universality of the Church, East and West. The *Vita* reports that the consecration took place on the Feast of the Chair of the apostle Peter (22 February, in that year apparently a Sunday), which commemorated the beginning of Peter's mission at Antioch rather than at Rome, celebrated on 18 January. Both feasts are recalled in the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, a martyrology of Irish origin (surviving in an eleventh-century copy from St David's Wales), that makes a point of celebrating martyrs of the universal Church, East and West, including the feast of Samson on 25 July.³ The account of Samson's consecration reminds readers that he was heir to the founding figures of the universal Church, quelling the doubts of any who might question his legitimacy. Our one record of Samson being present at a church council in Paris, sometime between 556 and 573, does not name him as an *episcopus*, although we can assume that this was his rank like the others mentioned as signatories.⁴ By contrast, Samson is not listed as present at the Council of Tours in 567, where there was, among many rulings against ecclesiastical irregularity and relationships with women, a specific ruling against any 'Briton or Roman' being ordained a bishop without the approval of the metropolitan and his fellow bishops.⁵ Even during his life, Samson's legitimacy as a bishop was being challenged.

A noteworthy feature of the *Vita* is its claim that Samson went to Ireland before his consecration, having decided to accompany certain learned Irish monks, philosophers, who were returning from Rome.⁶ Basing himself at Dún Etair (St Dughal's Church, Balgriffin, just north of Dublin), Samson reportedly became

² *VIS*, I.42–43.

³ The two feasts are mentioned in the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, a copy of which (Dublin, Trinity College MS A.4.20) belonged to Rhygyfarch at St David's in the eleventh century, along with mention of *depositio sancti Samsonis episcopi* in *The Psalter and Martyrology of Ricemarch*, ed. Lawlor, 6 and 9, also 19. This copy is textually related to that of Echternach (copied 773, belonging to Willibrord), in which Samson is mentioned only as an abbot. It reveals that their common source included various Irish saints, including Patrick, Brigid, Colum Cille, Manchán *sapiens* (2 January), Fursa (16 January), Laisréan (18 April). The St David's copy also has some other Welsh and Breton saints added (Padarn, Turiau, Judicael), as well as a few Continental saints like St Amand (585–674), but none later than the seventh century, suggesting that it was based on an exemplar from the late seventh or early eighth centuries. Taylor, *The Life of St Samson*, xi, assumed the consecration took place on the second of two feasts of the Chair of St Peter in 521; Burkitt, 'St Samson of Dol', 51, queried this conclusion as the 22 February feast falls on a Sunday in 522 (not 521) and 526.

⁴ *Concilium Parisiense*, ed. de Clercq, *Concilia*, 210; on its date, Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 66.

⁵ *Concilium Turonense*, ed. de Clercq, *Concilia*, 179.

⁶ *VIS*, I.37: 'Euenit autem ut aduenirent ad eum quidam peritissimi Scotti de Roma uenientes, ac diligenter perscrutans eos inueniensque philosophos eos esse, ad suam patriam illos comitari fecit, episcopo permittente, ibique non multum demorans multasque uirtutes, Deo auctore, faciens, ab omnibus religiosis illius prouinciae ut aiunt angelis Dei uenerebatur.' ('It happened that certain very learned Irishmen coming from Rome came to him, and, scrutinizing them carefully and finding them to be philosophers, accompanied them to their country, with the permission of the bishop; staying there not for a long time, but demonstrating many virtues through divine inspiration, was revered by all religious people of that province, as they say, by the angels of God.')

famous for healing lepers and turning people ‘away from the path of error’.⁷ The *Vita* reports that he had acquired permission to go to Ireland, not from any Irish bishop, but from bishop Dubricius, and subsequently left his nephew Umbraphel in charge of the abbey he acquired there. Samson returned home before eventually sailing to *Docco* (St Kew, *Landochou* in the tenth century) on the north coast of Cornwall before going on to Brittany.⁸ The *Vita* tells us that he took a wagon laden with books and sacred vessels while he rode in a horse-drawn cart that he had brought from Ireland across Cornwall to Brittany.⁹ The *Vita* had explained that Vinniau, the wisest monk at *Docco* in Cornwall, approved Samson travelling on to Brittany if he could produce a final miracle.¹⁰ Samson’s miraculous rescue of the countryside from a dragon led to his placing his father, Amon, in charge of his monastic foundation, probably at Golant, near the south coast of Cornwall, from where Samson embarked for Brittany.¹¹ The *VIS* thus presents Samson as establishing a line of communication with Ireland, mediated through members of his family. Jonathan Wooding has argued that in the sixth century there were still functioning trade routes connecting Ireland to Rome and the Eastern Mediterranean.¹² The testimony of the *Vita* about Samson having once travelled to Ireland is thus not outside the bounds of possibility.

Samson’s learning and the Irish connection

The report of how Samson travelled with his books and liturgical vessels and his Irish cart gives a precious glimpse into the role of a missionary in promoting literate culture in the sixth century.¹³ The most important christian centres in Ireland at that time were those of Brigit of Kildare (*ob.* 521), whose Life was recorded by Cogitosus *ca* 650, and of Patrick (*ob.* 466/93) at Armagh, first celebrated by Tírechán and Muirchú *ca*

⁷ *VIS*, I.37 (‘ac per eum Dominus in eadem prouincia multos caecos illuminans multosque leprosos mundans ac daemoniacos fugans, plerosque de uia erroris saluauit’) –40. On the location, see Ó Riain, ‘Samson, alias San(c)tan?’, 320–3. See also Ó Riain, ‘Santán’, *A Dictionary*, 546–7; here he is associated with St Ann’s Chapel (Ceall Easpaig Shantáin, parish of Tallaght) and linked with the brother of the Welsh pilgrim Madóg (the Welsh *Madawg*). Ó Riain also reports that an Old Irish hymn, beginning *Aeoch rí n-amra n-aingel* (‘I implore the wonderful king of the angels’), attributed to Santán, describes him as going west from Clonard to Inis Madóg, named after his brother, Doc; *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, ed. Bernard & Atkinson, 1.129.

⁸ On the Cornish sites, see Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 12–14 and 82.

⁹ *VIS*, I.47: ‘Atque ita dimittente in eodem loco nauem suam, plaustrum ordinans ad portanda spiritalia utensilia sua atque uolumina, suumque currum in duobus inponens equis quem de Hibernia apud se adportauerat, patriam pertransiens, Domino comitante, iter suum ordinauit.’ (‘And so, sending off his ship in the same place, he planned his journey, using a cart to carry his spiritual utensils and books, and having yoked his chariot, which he had brought with him from Ireland, to two horses, he crossed the country, with the aid of the Lord.’)

¹⁰ *VIS*, I.46.

¹¹ *VIS*, I.52.

¹² Wooding, ‘Trade as a factor’, observes the presence of Eastern Mediterranean pottery in south-west Britain in the sixth century.

¹³ Sharpe assumes that Samson did indeed visit Ireland, ‘Books from Ireland’, 10; on the claim of the Life to preserve an earlier account by someone in his immediate circle, see Sowerby, ‘The Lives of St Samson’.

670–80.¹⁴ The fact that the *VIS* makes no reference to Patrick suggests that it was written before his cult had become widely established, when episcopal structures had not yet been clearly delineated. The *Vita* presents Samson's key spiritual mentor as Illtud, himself reportedly ordained by Gallican bishop Germanus of Auxerre (perhaps during a visit to Britain in 429 or *ca* 435–47).¹⁵ Samson was entrusted as a child to Illtud's care, presumably in the 480s. Samson's hagiographer (or perhaps the author of the account on which the *Life* draws) reports spending time in Illtud's monastery, and praises its founder as 'master of all Britain' and skilled in 'every kind of philosophy', namely 'metrics, rhetoric, grammar and arithmetic and of all the arts of philosophy'.¹⁶ This positive attitude to learning reflects the perspectives of the *Institutiones* of Cassiodorus (485–585), who took over Boethius's civic position in Rome in 523. The stories connecting Samson to Illtud and the Irish monks coming from Rome suggest a desire to demonstrate his authority to Irish monks on the Continent.

Some decades later, Columbanus (543–615), a native of Leinster, went to study at Comgall's great abbey at Bangor, prior to travelling through Brittany *ca* 590, possibly via Dol and Saint-Colombe, to the shrine of St Martin at Tours. Columbanus then went on to establish monastic houses at Luxeuil and elsewhere in eastern France.¹⁷ With a following of both Irish and British/Breton monks, he established a network of foundations north and east of the Loire valley that paralleled those of Samson in Brittany. Significantly, Columbanus referred in a letter to Gregory the Great to two other British ascetics, Vinniau and Gildas, whose teaching is also recalled in the *Collectio Hibernensis*, produced in Ireland in the late seventh or early eighth century and preserved in Breton manuscripts.¹⁸ While Columbanus never referred to Patrick, he respected the ascetic authority of two other spiritual mentors from Britain, neither of whom claimed the title of bishop.

The texts on which Samson's hagiographer draws constitute a remarkable ascetic library of authors read in Gaul, mostly from the fifth century. It included the *Dialogues*

¹⁴ Cogitosus, *Vita S. Brigidae*, ed. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 72.775–90. See: Sharpe, 'Vitae S. Brigatae: the oldest texts'; McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century: a saint with three Lives?'. Translations are offered by Connolly & Picard, 'Cogitosu's "Life of St Brigit"' and Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigatae: background and historical value'. The Lives of Tirechan and Muirchú are edited and translated by Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*; see also Howlett, *Muirchú Moccu Macthéni's 'Vita Sancti Patricii'* and translations of both Lives by De Paor, *Saint Patrick's World*, 175–97 and 207–26. Patrick's date is much contested. The case for 493 is advanced by a number of authors in Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick AD 493–1993*.

¹⁵ Chronologically, the claim is difficult. On the dating of Germanus's career, see Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication*, 116, 278–82.

¹⁶ *VIS*, Prol.2 and I.7: 'Ille uero Eltutus de totis Scripturis ueteris scilicet ac noui Testamenti et omnis philosophiae generis metrice ac rhetoricae, grammaticaeque et arithmeticae, et omnium artium philosophiae omnium Britannorum compertissimus erat, genereque magicus sagacissimusque futurorum praescius.' ('Indeed, that Illtud was most the learned of the Britons in all the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament and of every kind of philosophy, of metre and rhetoric, grammar and arithmetic, and in kind a most wise magus, aware of the future.') The phrase echoes the reference of Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, 36, ed. Winterbottom, *The Ruin of Britain*, 104: 'sed monita tibi profecto non desunt, cum habueris praeceptorem paene totius Britanniae magistrum elegantem'. ('But warnings are clearly not lacking for you, since you have as a teacher the most accomplished master of all Britain.')

¹⁷ Columbanus refers to being in the neighbourhood of the Britons in Epistola 4, in *Sancti Columban Opera*, ed. Walker, 36. Jonas of Bobbio refers to both Breton and Irish monks in his entourage, *Vita Columban*, 1.13, ed. Krusch, 74.

¹⁸ Columbanus, Epistola 1, ed. Walker, 8. On these authorities and their quotation in the *Collectio Hibernensis*, see Richard Sharpe, 'Gildas as a Father of the Church'.

and *Life of St Martin* by Sulpicius Severus, the writings of Cassian, Evagrius, Jerome, Pomerius (a teacher of rhetoric in Arles), and Rufinus, namely his history of the monks of Egypt, which helped transmit the ascetic perfectionism of the East. Like Columbanus and Gildas, Samson's hagiographer makes no allusion to Augustine, who focused more on human weakness and need for grace than on ascetic effort in the manner of Pelagius.¹⁹ This absence of explicit allusion to Augustinian ecclesiology and preference for an ascetic tradition that went back to Origen and the desert Fathers of the East, mediated by Cassian, again suggests that the *Life* is more likely to have been written in the seventh rather than the eighth century.²⁰ The hagiographer also knew (or added to the original account he had found) Gregory the Great's *Homilies on the Gospels* and *Regula Pastoralis*.²¹ These two works of Gregory were known to Columbanus (who may have received the *Regula Pastoralis* directly from Gregory).²² The fact that Samson's *Vita* shows no awareness of Gregory's *Dialogues*, widely circulated by the early eighth century, again suggests an earlier date. While it may have been known to Jonas of Bobbio in 640, the *Dialogues* started to be widely known in Gaul only after the abbot of Fleury sought to obtain (ca 660) the relics of Benedict and Scholastica. This event, attested only through later reports, marked the beginning of a shift in Frankish monasticism away from dependence on Columbanus and toward greater recognition of the authority of Benedict.²³ The evidence for Bede having an influence on the *Vita Samsonis* is tenuous in the extreme.²⁴ What is more striking is the

¹⁹ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 92–9. In the index of authors quoted by Walker in his edition, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, 221–2, just two allusions to Augustine are mentioned, neither of which are conclusive. By contrast Columbanus makes numerous explicit references to Jerome in his Letters (*Sancti Columbani Opera*, 2, 8, 10, 18, 20). Jonas of Bobbio refers to Augustine just once at the outset of his *Vita* (1.1, ed. Krusch, 152).

²⁰ While the influence of Pelagius is emphasized by Herren & Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, he was only one of a range of ascetic authors, independent of Augustine, shaped by this ascetic tradition.

²¹ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 92–4. While Flobert and Poulin (in this volume) argue that *VIS* also draws on certain texts (such as pseudo-Bede) not attested in manuscript prior to the mid-eighth century, these texts that now survive only from after 750 could easily come from an earlier period.

²² Gregory the Great refers to his sending the *Regula Pastoralis* to Columbanus in *Registrum* 5.17, ed. Norberg, 285; transl. Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, 335, with another mention in 11.9 (ed. Norberg, 874; transl. Martyn, 744). Martyn discusses these and other letters which he thinks may be connected to Ireland in 'Pope Gregory the Great and the Irish', 65–83. Thus he also counts as possibly relating to Ireland various other Letters of Gregory: 2.43 (ed. Norberg, 131–2; transl. Martyn, 222), an encyclical addressed to Eastern bishops, but addressed in only one manuscript as *per Hiberniam* rather than *per Hiberiam*; 4.18 (March 594) about a *peregrinus*, possibly Irish, attached to the abbey of St Pancras (transl. Martyn, 301); 11.52 to Bishop Quiricus and other bishops *in Hiberia* (ed. Norberg, 952; transl. Martyn, 796–99, preferring *Hibernia*).

²³ For discussion of the slowness with which Gregory's *Dialogues* started to circulate, see Mews, 'Gregory the Great, the Rule of Benedict and Roman liturgy: the evolution of a legend'; see also the definitive vindication of Gregory's authorship of the *Dialogues* by Meyvaert, 'The authentic Dialogues of Gregory the Great'.

²⁴ Flobert (*La Vie ancienne*, 98) claims the following references to Bede: *VIS*, II.7 (quotation of Matthew 13.47, using *rete* for nets, like Bede, Epistola 12); *VIS*, II.3, that the portico of Solomon was 'paciis et unitatis uere signum figuraliter' ('figuratively a sign of true peace and unity'), alludes to a quite different phrase of Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, 3.11: 'ad limina ueri et pacifici Salomonis' ('to the threshold of the true and peace-making Solomon'); 1.26 (*theomacha* [divine fight]) and 27 (*Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum*, 5.39). The term *theomacha* was used before Bede by Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2.20 and 17.11, ed. Mommsen, 23 and 231. Flobert also claims that the sixth century in Ireland was an *époque noire* in *La Vie ancienne*, 200, n.37. I share here the views raised by Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', 21 and Lynette Olson in her study, 'The date of the First Life of St Samson of Dol', 181–2.

radical difference between Bede's exegetical and historical writing, strongly shaped by Augustine, and the emphasis of the *Vita* on connecting to the apostolic authority not just of Rome, but of Jerusalem and the East. There is no sense in the account of Samson of specifically Roman liturgical tradition, such as mediated through the Rule of Benedict, not being given emphasis on the Continent until the eighth century.

Columbanus speaks with pride of the philosophical learning of the Irish as superior to that of Victorius of Aquitaine, followed by Gallican bishops since 541.²⁵ The Irish and British observance of Easter followed the practice of Sulpicius Severus (*ob.* 425), who had himself improved upon a system of 84-year cycles attributed to Anatolius of Laodicea in 270.²⁶ In this perspective, the celebration of Easter focused more on Christ's resurrection than on his passion as in the African and Roman churches.²⁷ By 628, Pope Honorius was urging Irish bishops to conform to the Roman date of Easter, provoking a serious division in the Irish Church, as many monastic communities preferred to keep to the old traditions. While the pope's accusation that the Irish were Quartodecimans was inaccurate, as Bede knew, given that the Irish certainly celebrated Easter on a Sunday (not the 14th of the lunar month of Nisan), the Irish did have reservations about the calculation of Victorius of Aquitaine. The *Vita Samsonis* betrays no hint of these controversies. The allusion to Samson's friendship with learned Irish monks coming back from Rome suggests a deliberate effort to emphasise his connections to both Ireland and Roman custom. After the synod of Whitby in 664, pressure was mounting on bishops in Cornwall and Devon to relinquish their traditional practices, as is evident from the synod of Hertford (672) and a letter of Aldhelm (*ca* 705), creating a schism that lasted at least until 731.²⁸ Observance of Easter was only one of a number of issues, including that of tonsure, over which there was division. Even if Samson had adopted Gallican observance by the time he attended the Council of Paris (565 $\times$ 73), there were no official attempts to impose liturgical uniformity until after the time of Gregory the Great. It seems more likely that in the sixth century Samson simply continued British liturgical custom.

The close links between Britain and Ireland in the early sixth century are also attested by other hagiographical sources, as difficult to date as the Life of Samson.²⁹ Finnian of Clonard (*ca* 470–549) reportedly spent thirty years in Britain, studying with Gildas, David and Cathmaeus (Cadoc or Docco), before establishing a major school at Clonard, where he reportedly mentored 'the twelve apostles of Ireland'.³⁰

²⁵ Epistola 1, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. Walker, 3–6.

²⁶ Ó Cróinín & McCarthy, 'The "lost" Irish 84-year Easter Table rediscovered'. See also Cullen, 'A Question of Time or a Question of Theology: A Study of the Easter Controversy in the Insular Church'.

²⁷ Csaki, 'Moses and the paschal liturgy', in *Illuminating Moses*, 104–15, esp. 108.

²⁸ 'Letter to Geraint', edd. Lapidge & Herren, *Aldhelm, The Prose Works*, 157; Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5.18, ed. Colgrave & Mynors, 298–9. Cullen, 'A Question of Time', 232–6; Lapidge & Herren (edd.), *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 155.

²⁹ Much controversy surrounds the dating of the whole body of anonymous Lives of Irish saints, so many of whom flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, presents persuasive arguments for a date before 800 of a specific group of saints' Lives (the so-called O'Donohue group) preserved in a legendary (*Salmanticensis*) that he argued had been copied from an early medieval exemplar; by contrast Ó Riain, *A Dictionary*, argues that all these anonymous lives come from the twelfth century. Cf. n.3 above.

³⁰ *Vita Finniani* in *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. Heist, 97: 'Cumque apud civitatem Kellmunnensem in Britannia applicuissent, ibi sanctus Finnianus tres viros sanctos, videlicet sanctum David et sanctum Cathmaeum et sanctum Gildam, invenit.' ('And when they had landed at the *civitas Kellmunnensis* [St David's?] in Britain, saint Finnian found there three holy men, namely St David, St Cathmael [Cadoc or Docco?] and St Gildas.')

Finnian's disciple, Brendan of Clonfert (d. 576 × 83), is similarly remembered for his exchanges with 'Gildas the wise'.³¹ In the *Catalogus* of Irish saints, written to assert the authority of Patrick and Armagh over the other saints of Ireland in late eighth or ninth century, Finnian of Clonard is recalled as the first of a line of monks, 'mostly priests, but few bishops', who received their liturgical traditions from Gildas, David, and Docco.³² Chronologically, the Vinniau who met Samson is more likely to be Finnian of Clonard than Finnian of Moville. Dating the period of activity of Gildas is notoriously difficult, as dates for his death vary between 512 (claimed by William of Malmesbury) and 570.³³ If Samson was born around 480, it is quite possible that he went to Brittany around 520, just before Finnian (Vinniau?) established Clonard in Ireland. Whatever the exact chronology, the hagiographer's desire to connect Samson to Illtud and thus to Germanus parallels the efforts of hagiographers of Patrick to present their hero as an earlier protégé of Germanus. There is no evidence that Samson's hagiographer had read Muirchú's account of Patrick or knew of his reputation.³⁴ The connection made in the *Vita* between Samson and Germanus, through Illtud, served to strengthen Samson's standing in the eyes of the Gallican Church, while also seeking to impress monks from Ireland.

The *Vita Samsonis* attaches much value to Samson's regular singing of the mass and divine office for various feasts, implying that he saw liturgical performance as

³¹ *Vita altera sancti Brendani, in Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. Heist, 329–30.

³² Grosjean, 'Edition et commentaire du Catalogus sanctorum Hiberniae' with editions of four different versions on 207–13; see 206 (also 208, 209): 'unam tonsuram habentes et unam celebrationem misse, et unum pascha, scilicet post equinoctium vernale, celebrabant' ('having one tonsure and one celebration of the mass, they celebrated one Easter, namely after the spring equinox'). By contrast, speaking of Finnian and others, see *Catalogus*, 206 (also in two other versions, 208–9, 210): 'Unum caput Deum colentes, diversos celebrandi ritus habebant et diversas regulas Vivendi, et unum pascha, scilicet xiiii^a, celebrabant, et hii uniformem tonsuram, silicet ab aure usque ad aurem, faciebant. ... Hii ritum celebrandi missam acceperunt a sanctis viris de Britannia, scilicet a sancto David et sancto Gilda et a sancto Doco.' ('Worshipping one chief God, they had different rites of celebration and different rules of living, and celebrated one Easter, namely on the fourteenth, and they adopted a uniform tonsure, namely from ear to ear. ... They accepted their rite of celebrating mass from the holy men of Britain, namely from St David and St Gildas and St Docco.')

³³ William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, ed. Scott, 54: 'nam, sicut a maioribus accepimus, Gildas, neque insulsus neque infacetus historicus, cui Britanni debent si quid noticie inter ceteras gentes habent, multum annorum ibi exegit loci sanctitudine captus. Ibique anno domini DXII de medio factus, in uestusta ecclesia ante altare est sepultus.' ('For, as we have received from the elders, Gildas, a historian who was neither stupid nor boorish, to whom the Britons owe what knowledge they have among other peoples, spent many years there, captured by the holiness of the place. And there in the year 512 A.D. he was taken from their midst and buried in the old church before the altar.') The *Annales Cambriae*, ed. Williams, 5, report that Gildas went to Ireland in 565 and died in 570, and that David died in 601 (aged 147, the same age as Jacob), influencing dates given in the Irish annals. The *Annales Cambriae*, compiled no earlier than the late eighth century, claim that David was born in 458, thirty years after the departure of Patrick from Wales. In the eleventh century, Rhygyfarch speaks of Gildas being dumbstruck by the unborn David, but also that he was prophesied by Patrick thirty years before his birth, as does the liturgical office of St David, which mentions certain details not in Rhygyfarch, such as that Germanus was in Britain preaching against Pelagius in 433 when he befriended Patrick, as well as that Patrick prophesied David thirty years before his birth; Owain Tudor Edwards, 'The office of St David', esp. 242, and the *Vita Sancti David*, 1 and 5, ed. Sharpe & Davies, 'Rhygyfarch's Life of St David', 108 and 112–14. Charles-Edwards dates Gildas's birth to the 480s/490s and the *De excidio* to the 530s–540s, *Wales and the Britons*, 217.

³⁴ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 99.

reasserting apostolic authority.³⁵ Its second book is more of a sermon for his feast day, which it says was celebrated on both sides of the sea, justifying the occasion by citing a line from Gregory the Great on the Gospels, incorrectly identified as from Scripture.³⁶ The mistake highlights the underlying importance within its account of Samson's liturgical practice as in accord with that of the universal Church, symbolised by the authority not just of Peter, but of James and John.

Columbanus and the liturgy of the Irish

A vivid sign of the tension created by an early wave of migration to Brittany before Samson is evident in a letter sent *ca* 511 by the bishops of Rennes, Tours and Angers to two Breton priests (Lovocat and Catihern), condemning what they considered a heretical practice of carrying around portable altars (*tabulae*) on which the mass was celebrated 'with the assistance of women, to whom you have given the name *conhospitae*; in such a way that while you distribute the eucharist, they hold the chalices and presume to administer'.³⁷ Their criticism is of a degree of informality in the celebration of the Eucharist prior to the construction of stone churches, and of women serving, perhaps in the role of deaconess, in the administration of the sacrament. This phenomenon of male-female co-operation in the liturgy could possibly relate to the report in the Irish *Catalogus* (possibly of the eighth or ninth century) of association with women (*mulierum consortia*) being a practice of Patrick and early bishops of Ireland, but not of Finnian and other monastic leaders.³⁸ Samson's excommunication of his sister, for unknown reasons, suggests that he was closer to this monastic generation of the mid-sixth century than to the more experimental practices introduced by early missionaries into Brittany, frowned upon by the Gallo-Roman bishops of the Loire valley. Even if there is little emphasis in the *Vita* on the geographical character of the diocese of Dol, it was traditional in its perspectives on male authority.

By the seventh century, liturgical celebration was fundamentally monastic in character. There was, however, a difference in the way the Psalter was recited. Columbanus followed the practice of reciting the Psalter by heart, presumably in the same way as Samson. He mandated singing twelve *chori* (each made up of three psalms, the third sung antiphonally), but increasing to twenty-five groups of three psalms over mid-winter.³⁹ This habit of reciting the Psalter continuously (*psalterium currens*) was quite different from the more organised Roman system, introduced by

³⁵ See references to singing the mass, *VIS*, I.8,41–42,44–45; II.9.

³⁶ *VIS*, II.5: 'Ceterum ut Scriptura dicit: Nihil prodest interesse festis hominum, si deesse contingat festi angelorum.' ('Besides, as Scripture says: It is of no use to be present at the feasts of men if it happens that there are no feasts of the angels.')

³⁷ The text is translated and discussed by Bailey, 'The strange case of the portable altar'; the letter is edited and translated in Mathisen, 171–3 and 214–16. See also Merdrignac, 'The saints and the second British migration', 119–54, esp. 136–7.

³⁸ *Catalogus*, ed. Grosjean, 206 (*Salmanticensis*) and 210 (*Ussher*): 'Mulierum administrationem et consortia non respuebant, quia, super petram Christum fundati, ventum temptationis non timebant.' ('They did not reject the service and company of women, because, founded on Christ, the rock, they did not fear the wind of temptation.')

In the version in London, BL Add. 30512, ed. Grosjean, 208: 'et mulierum ministrationem non respuebant, nec laicos nec feminas de ecclesiis repellebant.' This may have shortened *administratio* to *ministratio* (service) because it did not understand how women could have been involved in administration of sacraments.

³⁹ Columbanus lays out these principles in chapter 7 of his Rule, ed. Walker, 128–30.

Benedict, of singing the entire Psalter only once a week, whatever the season, but with antiphons appropriate to the occasion. In the Bangor Antiphonary, written in the late seventh century, there are a significant number of antiphons for the mass and specific feasts, but there is no indication of any cycle of chants for the divine office in the manner of a Benedictine antiphonal. Irish and British liturgical practice relied more on memory for reciting psalms, reserving written text for prayers by the priest. The Bangor Antiphonary, certainly at Bobbio by 824, shows how Irish monks adapted Gallican practice, while maintaining their own traditions. It includes a hymn in praise of abbots of Bangor, copied between 680 and 691, as well as our earliest known hymns in honour of St Patrick, his disciple Camelacus, and St Comgall (*ob.* 602), the mentor of Columbanus.⁴⁰ Irish chant is preserved in manuscript only from the tenth century, as demonstrated through the careful palaeographical work of Scappaticci on the surviving liturgical manuscripts of Bobbio.⁴¹ The manuscripts of Bobbio record the final stage of these Irish liturgical traditions.

The Ratio de cursus, apostolic authority, and the struggle over liturgy

The witness of the *Vita Samsonis* to liturgical tradition in the sixth and seventh centuries can usefully be compared to that offered in an eighth-century text under the title *Ratio de cursu qui fuerunt eius auctores* or ‘Explanation of the Liturgies, about who were its authors’.⁴² This treatise, unfairly dismissed by Warren as ‘outlandish’ in its claims for an Egyptian background to Irish liturgy, helps us to understand how the Irish viewed liturgy as capable of evoking ascetic traditions that derived from the Egyptian desert, and ultimately from the apostles.⁴³ It helps to elucidate the monastic culture that we see presented in the *Vita Samsonis* as connecting back to the ascetic traditions of Egypt and thus of the apostles. The *Ratio* was written in the mid-eighth century, just as ‘Irish’ and Gallican liturgies were being challenged by a desire to impose what was seen as ‘authentic Roman liturgy’, promoted by the advisers of Charlemagne’s father, Pepin (752–68), who had been anointed by Pope Stephen at Saint-Denis in 754. It is no coincidence that Pepin had launched an attack on Brittany in 751, commencing a process that ended in Brittany’s submission to the Empire in 831.⁴⁴ The author of the *Ratio de cursu* defends the liturgies both of the Gauls and of the *Scotti* from accusations that they lacked apostolic authority. Like the *Vita Samsonis*, the *Ratio* argues that true liturgy derives not just from the church of St Peter, but also from the other apostles, above all St Mark and St John.

Preserved in a single manuscript of the late eighth century (British Library, Cotton Nero A.II, fos 37–42), the *Ratio de cursu* was first edited in the seventeenth century

⁴⁰ On the Bangor Antiphonary, see Curran, *The Antiphonary of Bangor*.

⁴¹ Scappaticci, *Codici e liturgia a Bobbio*; see also her study of the mass for the feast of Columbanus, ‘In natale sancti Columbani abbatis ad missam’.

⁴² *Ratio de cursu qui fuerunt eius auctores*, ed. Semmler, in *Initia consuetudinis Benedictinae*, ed. Hallinger, 77–91.

⁴³ On the document (of which a translation is given at the end of this study), see Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, 76–8, with a dismissive comment on 77, n.4: ‘The evidence of this confusing document, so far as it is worth anything, asserts the original Irish liturgy used by St Patrick to have been neither Roman nor Gallican, but Alexandrian. In this respect it is an isolated statement, unsupported by any other evidence.’

⁴⁴ Galliou & Jones, *The Bretons*, 192–3.

and translated by Patrick Francis Moran in 1864.⁴⁵ Yet even after Josef Semmler produced a new annotated edition of the text, it has attracted little scholarly attention apart from an important study by Dominique Barbet-Massin.⁴⁶ In a brief introduction, Semmler observed that it was written by a devotee of Columbanus, very familiar with both Gallican and Irish liturgical custom. A brief comment it makes about St Mark preaching in Italy led Semmler to suggest that it may have been written in an Irish monastery in northern Italy, even though its focus is more on the Irish and the Gauls than on Italian practice.⁴⁷

Semmler did not mention Levison's argument that the section of the manuscript in which the *Ratio* occurs (fos 14–45) was written 'in pre-Caroline minuscule, probably in France'.⁴⁸ The *Ratio* is part of a series of texts that begins with a sermon (fos 14r–27r) on various issues, in particular pagan customs, and deriving from various Church Fathers, notably Caesarius of Arles (468–542).⁴⁹ This is followed in the Cotton manuscript by a range of texts, both exegetical and grammatical, that still have to be identified.⁵⁰ Of particular interest is a chronicle of the world, identified

⁴⁵ Moran, *Essays on the Origins, Doctrines and Discipline of the Early Irish Church*, 243–6. He reprints the initial edition of Spelman, *Concilia*, 176–8, reproduced in Haddan & Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, 1.38–40.

⁴⁶ Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure et le Sacré*, 449–85; I am indebted to Joseph-Claude Poulin for drawing this important volume to my attention, after the initial writing of this paper, and to Barbet-Massin for sharing a paper, 'The tract *Ratio de cursu* and the question of the Irish liturgy' (forthcoming).

⁴⁷ Semmler (ed.), *Ratio*, 80.

⁴⁸ Levison, *England the Continent*, 303, with discussion of the manuscript (of which a copy was made in the seventeenth century, preserved in BL, Cleopatra E.I, fos 5–7), 302–14; Semmler's statement (*Ratio*, 80) that Lindsay, Lowe, Levison and Bischoff all support an Italian origin for the text is not correct. Levison was challenging a suggestion made by Lindsay for a Verona origin of the manuscript, *Notae Latinae*, 461; it had been reproduced in Thompson, *Catalogue of Ancient Manuscripts*, 2.54, with plate 32 (fos 27v–28). It is also reproduced by Lowe, *Codices latini antiquiores* II.20, tab.1.

⁴⁹ Levison, *England and the Continent*, 308–12, edits part of this text from this manuscript (fos 15v–16v) and two others, one from St Martial Limoges, the other from the Schottenkloster at Wurzburg, describing sacrilegious songs that Christians were accustomed to singing once outside the church, as well as pagan ceremonies performed at the new year, misunderstanding Venus as a man. In the early seventeenth-century list of contents this text is broken up into: '4. Diversae sermones et tractatus ab auctore antiquissimo qui vixit circa annum Christi 729; 5. Exhortationes ad Christianos a Paganis ritibus diversos; 6. Sermo ex Deuteronomio; 7. Historia Narratio Diuitis et Lazari; 8. Confessio sancti Augustini; 9. tractatus de literis; 10. Chronicon ab initio mundi ad annum 729; 11. De bonis operibus ex Chrisostomo; 12. De angelis ex Sancto Hieronimo; 13. Prima institutio et varietas Ecclesiastici serviata precipue in Britannia et Gallia; 14. De penis damnatorum.'

⁵⁰ (fos 27r–29v) 'Legimus in libro Deuteronomii Iordane asce[nde]ns missum ... deficiemus impos[uisse?]; [new quire] (fos 30r–30v) De divite et Lazaro. Hic diues populus iudaicus intellegitur ... sensus corporis; (fos 30v–31r) Sacerdos meus ... et thumacus; (fos 30r–33v) In nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi. Incipit fides sancti augustini episcopi contra omnes hereticus [sic]. Credimus in unum uerum deum ... uenerandus anathema; (fos 33v–34v) Incipit de littera. Littera quid est elementum uocis articulati. Elementum quid est conceptio sensui. Sensus quid est gloriatio cogitationis qui explanatur per uocem. Uox est autem uerbum aut uerbum ante uocem ... Littera dicitur quasi lege utens quia legentibus uter prebet.'

in the seventeenth century as written in 728.⁵¹ The chronicle is a computation of years from Creation to the time of the author, based on the chronicle of Eusebius, supplemented by the Easter cycle of Victorius of Aquitaine. While its text was originally completed in 728, a sentence states that a further forty years have passed, implying that this chronicle may have been recopied in 768.⁵² Barbet-Massin has observed that the chronicle is connected to others in Corbie and Luxeuil. She suggests that while its original redaction may be from 728, the text was revised in or soon after 768 somewhere within Francia. It has been suggested that the manuscript itself may have been copied at Nonantola (founded as a Benedictine monastery in 752) in the late eighth or early ninth century.⁵³ Wherever the *Ratio* was written, it was by an author anxious to promote both Irish and Gallican practices. Either in or before the seventeenth century, a liturgical calendar was included in the manuscript, that was copied in Winchester in the mid-eleventh century but derived from south-

⁵¹ *Chronica de tempore mundi*, ed. Hearne, *Thomae Sprotti Chronica*, 167–8 (fos 34v–36r) ‘Incipit de tempore mundi. Ab exordio mundi usque ad diluuium anni sunt duo milia ducenti, quadraginta et duo ... Supersunt anni post passionem domini per ciclum Victorie anni quingenti treginta et duae. Ipsius expletus hoc anno impleti sunt centum septuaginta et viii; sunt in summa ab exordio mundi usque ad praesente tempore anni quinque milia nongenti xxviii [with seventeenth-century annotation: *Anno mundo 5928 Anno Christi secutus 70 interpr[au]it. 729 vixit calculator et ab anno, id est 612, 883*] et remanent de sexto miliarum anni lxxii. Subtractus xl remanent xxxii [that is, 728]. Qui uult[t] considere, requirat Iulio Africano et Eusebio Cesariense episcop. Hyeronimo presbitero eruditissimo uiro.’

⁵² Levison, *England and the Continent*, 304; fos 35v–36 were reproduced by Bond & Thompson, *Facsimiles of Manuscripts and Inscriptions*, 2.2 (1885), plate 35.

⁵³ Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure*, 452–54, follows Levison, *England the Continent*, 303–4, in arguing that the chronicle was copied in 728 (not 739), but then recopied in or soon after 768. She reports the view of Flavia de Rubeis that the script has both Frankish and Beneventan elements similar to manuscripts from Nonantola in the late eighth or early ninth century. Augustino Yppo Cartegense episcopo Orosio presbitero, Victorio qui (fo.36r) [...] Isidoro Hispalense episcopo. Et Gregorio catholico et erudito uiro Toronense episcopo uel alius [*pro aliis*] quam plures quod longum est enumerare, per singula perplexo stilo has sentencias. He licuit, qui uult contendere apud ipsos conferat, quia superna illa ciuitas et angelis, et hominibus constat. Ad quam omnino et centum credimus humanum genus ascendere quantus illic contegit electus angelus remansisse sicut scriptum est. Constituit et minus [*pro numerus?*] gentium secundum numerum angelorum dei. (fos 36r–37r) Sententia sancti Iohanni angeli ... bonorum operum et ... Sic enim scriptura primum ... secundum opera sua; (fo. 37r) Sententia sancti Hyeronimi. Unicuique autem homini ... boni sunt modi. Isaia propheta dicit ... et qui usuram non accipiunt, quia beatus est docere quam acceperere.’ (‘He begins *About the time of the world*. From the beginning of the world to the Flood were 2,242 years ... There remain in the cycle of Victorius after the Lord’s passion 532 years. In this year itself, 178 years are fulfilled; there are in sum from the beginning of the world to the present time, 5928 years and there remain from the sixth millennium 72 years. Subtracting 40, there remain 32 [that is, 728]. One who wishes to consider this should look up these teachings individually, put in a complex way by Julius Africanus and Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, the priest Jerome, a most learned man, Augustine of Hippo, bishop of Carthage, the priest Orosius, Victorius, who [...] Isidore, bishop of Spain; and Gregory, a catholic and learned man, bishop of Tours or several others which it takes a long time to identify. It is permitted for one who wishes to contest these things to compare them, because that heavenly city is evident both to angels and to men. We believe that human kind has ascended a hundred fold, as much as the chosen angel happens to have remained. He has established the number of the peoples according to the number of the angels of God. The teaching of St John the angel ... of good works and ... For thus Scripture first ... according to his deeds; the teaching of St Jerome: ‘To each man ... there are good ways. Isaiah the prophet says ... and who does not accept increase, because it is blessed to teach rather than to receive.’)

west Britain (possibly Glastonbury), as it mentions many Irish and British saints, including Gildas, David, and Germanus. The litany of the prayer book into which it was bound includes mention of St Samson, a British example of memory of this saint.⁵⁴

The *Ratio de cursus* begins by seeking to dispel false claims made about the Gallican and Irish liturgies.⁵⁵ It recognises three other liturgical traditions – those of the East, of Ambrose of Milan, and of monks following Benedict, but accords them only brief attention and never identifies any apostolic authority for their practice. That the liturgy of the Irish (*cursus Scottorum*) derives from Gallican precedent has long been known to scholars.⁵⁶ The particular interest of this treatise, however, lies in its perception of two distinct apostolic origins. It claims that the Gallican liturgy was inherited from the earliest bishops of Gaul (Trophimus, Pothinus, and, in particular, Irenaeus of Lyons), who took their practice from St Peter in Rome and St John in Ephesus.⁵⁷ While it claims the authority of Eusebius and Irenaeus for this information, it could be drawing on the lost treatise written by Gregory of Tours on liturgy, to demonstrate how the early Gallican saints preserved apostolic tradition.⁵⁸ This sense of a debt to Irenaeus is revealing, given, as Barbet-Massin observes, that knowledge of the writings of Irenaeus was preserved in the Latin West in the early medieval period only in a so-called ‘Irish’ group of manuscripts, principally at Corbie, founded in the seventh century by Bathild, from Luxeuil. She also notes that Columbanus had a particular awareness of Polycarp, mentor of Irenaeus.⁵⁹ The *Ratio* author insists on the apostolic authority of these Gallican bishops in creating a sequence of reciprocating antiphons and responsories, culled from the Old and New Testaments, as from the writings of various authorities. This is slightly different from the claim of Cassiodorus, in his *Historia Tripartita*, that the practice of reciprocal antiphons was established by Ignatius of Antioch.⁶⁰ The insistence by the *Ratio* author that this

⁵⁴ *Sancte Samson* is mentioned in a litany after a series of saints (Basil, Honoratus, Viator, Isidore), but before a St Romanus, *A Pre-Conquest English Prayer-book*, ed. Muir, 126 (fo. 94r of the Nero manuscript). On 28 July, the calendar (*ibid.*, 3–14, at 9) mentions on fo. 4r not Samson, but an otherwise unknown *Saturnini, Episcopi et Martyris* (also mentioned on 27 January and *Saturninus Martyris* on 29 November). Other British-connected saints include Alban (2 March), Petroc (23 May), Germanus (31 July and 30 September), Gildas (29 January and 28 September), Neot (20 October), Winock, bishop (6 November). This section has a poem from the reign of Æthelstan, which celebrates the support the king of the English received from Constantinus rex Scottorum (*ibid.*, 19).

⁵⁵ *Ratio*, ed. Semmler, 83: ‘S<ed si sedulo inspiciamus auc>tores, in exordium repperimus decantatum fuisse non sicut aliqui inperiti falsae uel uariae obiectione pertuerunt et adhuc multi conantur fore.’ For translations of the *Ratio* see the appendix.

⁵⁶ Hen, ‘The nature and character of the early Irish liturgy’; Buckley, ‘Celtic chant’.

⁵⁷ *Ratio*, ed. Semmler, 85. On Trophimus, first bishop of Arles, see three letters of Pope Zosimus, ed. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 20.642–5; see also letter of bishops of Arles to Pope Leo I (ed. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 54.880). The author could be drawing from the report by Irenaeus about Clement as a loyal follower of the tradition of Peter, *Contra quinque haereses*, 3.3.3, edd. Rousseau & Doutreleau, 2.34.

⁵⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, 10.31, edd. Krusch & Levison, 536: ‘de Cursibus etiam unum librum condidi’ (‘On liturgies I have also composed one book’). Trophimus is not mentioned in Eusebius, but he is described as one of seven missionaries to Gaul, sent out from Rome, by Gregory of Tours, who was in turn quoting from a *Passio* of St Saturninus; see *ibid.*, 1.30, edd. Krusch & Levison, 23. Eusebius only refers to torments of Pothinus in *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Mommsen, 413.

⁵⁹ Barbet-Massin, *L’Enluminure*, 447–49, 460–1.

⁶⁰ Cassiodorus, *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita*, 10.9.1, edd. Jacob & Hanslik, 596.

liturgy had not been composed 'by any Gallican or British cleric given to singing, as many think', suggests that he was defending the Eastern connections of Gallican tradition against those who promoted Roman example.⁶¹ A similar argument was put forward by Colman at Whitby in 664, when resisting the desire of Wilfrid and the Romanising party to follow the practice of Rome.⁶²

By contrast, the *Ratio* insists that the liturgy transmitted by Columbanus from Patrick was not originally Irish, but had been passed on through Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes from Cassian and the monks of Lérins, 'which is said at the present time to be of the Irish, something which they claim by false opinion, but which blessed Mark the evangelist <promulgated>'.⁶³ It claims the authority of Josephus and Eusebius (that is, the *Historia ecclesiastica* translated by Rufinus) for saying that Mark preached the Gospel throughout Egypt and Italy, unifying them into one church. This foreshadows a claim made by Paul the Deacon (*ca* 720–99) that Mark went to Aquileia, before being sent to Alexandria.⁶⁴ Yet even if the *Ratio* author knew about Egypt, he knew more about Gallican and Irish custom. Paradoxically, Mark's Gospel never attracted a biblical commentary until the mid-seventh century, when an Irish monk (writing in 632, according to Bischoff) undertook the project.⁶⁵ Given that Columbanus never refers to the Gospel of Mark in his writing (and that there is only a single quotation of Mark in the *Vita Samsonis*), this Irish interest in Mark may have developed only later in the seventh century, but clearly with awareness of his links to Alexandria (which by-passed those of St Peter at Rome).⁶⁶ Even before his adoption by Venice, Mark was remembered in the early seventh century as preaching in Aquileia, where Jerome lived before settling in the East.⁶⁷

The *Ratio* author singles out that in the Markan liturgy followed by the Irish the entire community, male and female, used to sing together the *Gloria*, the *Sanctus*, the Lord's Prayer, and the Great Amen, as if this were an ancient apostolic practice of involving men and women, forgotten elsewhere. In Roman practice, all these prayers were recited uniquely by the priest or the clergy. According to a late-seventh-century testimony, the *Sanctus*, reportedly introduced into the liturgy by Pope Sixtus I (*ca* 116–25), was sung in Rome just by clerics, at least by the late seventh century. Elsewhere it is described as sung by clergy and people alternately.⁶⁸ By contrast, Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours in the fifth and sixth centuries imply that the *Sanctus* was sung by all the people, echoing the prayer of the angels.⁶⁹ The *Gloria in excelsis deo* is another hymn, again widely known within the Irish liturgy and certainly sung by the people according to Gregory of Tours, but according to Roman

⁶¹ *Ratio*, ed. Semmler, 86: 'non sicut multi opinantur, ut Gallicanus quidam clericus <vel> Britto modolactione deditus, quod ipsum edidisset quod non facit'.

⁶² Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.25.6, ed. Colgrave & Mynors, 152.

⁶³ *Ratio*, ed. Semmler, 86: 'Vnde et alium cursum qui dicitur praesente tempore Scottorum quae falsa opinione iactantur, sed beatus Marcus euangelista <ededit>.'

⁶⁴ Paul the Deacon, *Gesta episcoporum Metensium*, ed. Migne, Patrologia Latina, 95.711AB; Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure*, 462–3.

⁶⁵ *Expositio Euangelii secundum Marcum*, Prol., ed. Cahill, 2; Cahill questions Bischoff's attribution of the work to Cumman *ca* 632, but identifies it as Irish, from the seventh or early eighth century; see also the eighth-century *Praefatio secundum Marcum*, ed. McNally, 220.

⁶⁶ *VIS*, I.16.

⁶⁷ Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure*, 462–3.

⁶⁸ *Ordo Romanus I*, ed. Andrieu, *Les ordines romani*, 2.95 and 3.10.

⁶⁹ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 73.2, ed. Morin, 307; Gregory of Tours, *Liber de virtutibus S. Martini*, ed. Krusch, *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Miracula et Opera Minora*, 663.

Ordines from the late seventh century sung by the pontiff alone.⁷⁰ According to Caesarius, the Lord's Prayer was similarly to be recited by all, as a prayer that could, like antiphons and psalms 50 or 90, be understood even by rustics, male and female.⁷¹ Yet according to Gregory the Great, the Lord's Prayer was recited by the priest alone, even though it had been sung by all the people in the Greek Church.⁷² The Lord's Prayer is certainly known from the earliest Irish liturgical books, although not always in a consistent form.⁷³ Irish liturgy did not follow Roman norms to the letter.

While identifying the apostolic roots of both Gallican and Irish liturgies, the *Ratio de cursu* implies that Gallican practice was slipping away from original customs, better preserved in a tradition that it claims was transmitted to St Patrick by Germanus (of Auxerre) and Lupus (of Troyes) from the practice at Lérins. Its author describes Patrick as placed by them as archbishop over both Ireland and Britain – a claim first made in Ireland in around 680, perhaps as a response to the Romanisation of the English Church under Wilfrid.⁷⁴ Patrick passed on this liturgy to Comgall, who sent Columbanus to the Continent, from where monasteries (in fact perhaps over one hundred) were established all over Gaul, with some in northern Italy, over the seventh century. The treatise does not touch on the date of Easter. Columbanus had no time for what he considered to be the errors of Victorius of Aquitaine, and of the Gallican Church which followed him.⁷⁵ The discord between Irish and Gallican observance of Easter would not be resolved until long into the seventh century, when Irish monasteries fell in with Gallican practice. Even after the 630s, when Irish communities on the Continent agreed to follow the Roman date of Easter (like those in the southern part of Ireland), they proudly preserved their own liturgical customs.

The list of authorities adduced by the *Ratio* as having followed the *cursus Scottorum* reads as a roll-call of an ascetic tradition that connected Irish monks to the desert Fathers of Egypt. They include Cassian, who was critical of what he saw as a degree of liturgical excess at Lérins, but is here identified as a monk of that community. Cassian and Basil were both important to Colum Cille.⁷⁶ There was also Honoratus, its first abbot, Caesarius of Arles and his teacher, abbot Porcarius, as well as Lupus (of Troyes), another disciple of Honoratus. The treatise also praises Germanus of Auxerre for preaching the Gospel in Britain and Ireland ('in Britannii uel Scotiis')

⁷⁰ *Librum in Gloria martyrum*, ed. Krusch, *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Miracula et Opera Minora*, 530; *De virtutibus S. Martini*, ed. Krusch, *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Miracula et Opera Minora*, 618; *Ordo Romanus* 1, ed. Andrieu, 2.84; *Ordo Romanus* 5, ed. Andrieu, 2.215; *Ordo Romanus* 17, ed. Andrieu, 2.71 and 32.3, 42.20.

⁷¹ Caesarius, *Sermo* 1.12, ed. Morin, 10; *Sermo* 6.3, ed. Morin, 32; *Sermo* 54.1, ed. Morin, 236.

⁷² Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistolarum*, 9.26, ed. Norberg, 587.

⁷³ Moran, *Essays*, 247, reports that in the Evangelistarium of St Moling it occurs with the phrase 'Panem nostrum supersubstantialem da nobis hodie et remitte nobis ... et ne patieris nos induci in temptationem' ('Give us this day our supersubstantial bread, and forgive us ... and allow us not to be led into temptation'), deriving its wording from Luke 6:11 rather than Matthew.

⁷⁴ Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure*, 466–7.

⁷⁵ See Columbanus, *Epistola* 2 (to bishops and priests of the Church), ed. Walker, 6; *Epistola* 3 (to an unnamed pope), ed. Walker, 24; *Epistola* 4 (to his disciples), ed. Walker, 28.

⁷⁶ Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure*, 464; Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra Colum Cille', 255. The *Amra* (ed. Stokes, 40, 180) also reports that Colum Cille drew on the authority of Basil, whose Rule is preserved in a cluster of early medieval manuscripts from abbeys with an Irish foundation.

and he is also described as a monk of Lérins.⁷⁷ These monks are presented as having taught Patrick and as responsible for making him archbishop over not just Ireland but also Britain. Even if 'in Britanniis' is used here to refer to Wales rather than to the whole of the British Isles (as in some hagiographical texts from the period), this is still a remarkable claim. Patrick is described as *episcopus* in the late-seventh-century Lives by Muirchú and Tírechán with authority over all Ireland, but not as *archiepiscopus*, a title first used of him in the *Liber Angeli*, composed ca 678–87 and preserved only in the Book of Armagh, itself copied in the early ninth century.⁷⁸ Given that the claims for Patrician authority over all Ireland become clearly evident only by the late seventh century, it seems unlikely that the *Ratio* could have been written before this date. While the first Life of Samson transmits an image of ascetic and liturgical culture prior to the assertion of Patrick's episcopal authority in the late seventh century, the *Ratio de cursu* is closer in spirit to the mid-eighth century, when Irish monastic followers of Columbanus were having to accommodate themselves to episcopal authority and Gallican liturgy, even if they had not yet adopted the Rule of Benedict. Irish memories about Patrick reflected uncertainty about chronological details and early liturgical practice. In the late seventh century, Muirchú had dated Patrick's death to 469 (assuming he lived for 120 years). By contrast, the *Ratio* author claims that Patrick lived to 154 years and that he died in 493, rather than in 461 as claimed in other sources.⁷⁹ The first Life of Samson respected the authority of Germanus as having ordained Illtud, but avoided the grandiose claims that Irish monks were making by the late seventh century.

The Irish loyalty of the *Ratio* author is clear from its claim that an unidentified *Wandilocus senex* and Comgall (*Gomogillus*), whose abbey at Bangor reportedly had three thousand monks, traced their liturgy back to St Mark. Its claims echo a slightly more nuanced statement in the *Vita Comgalli* that there were three thousand monks altogether at Bangor and that many foundations were established during Comgall's time as abbot.⁸⁰ The *Ratio* declares that Comgall of Bangor sent out both *Wandilocus* and Columbanus to Gaul to preach the Gospel, in particular to Luxeuil, where they chanted the same liturgy as derived from the monks of Egypt. 'And thence, this later increased the form of their holiness through the whole globe of the

⁷⁷ *Vitae Caesarii episcopi Arelatensis*, 5, ed. Krusch, *Passiones*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, 3.459; *Vita Lupi episcopi Trecensis*, ed. Krusch & Levison, *Passiones*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, 7.296; on the travels of Germanus and Lupus to Britain see *Vita Germani* and *Vita Lupi*, 4, *ibid.*, 259–65, 297.

⁷⁸ *Liber Angeli*, 14 and 27, ed. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts of the Book of Armagh*, 186 and 188. On its date, see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 436–40.

⁷⁹ Muirchú, I.6, ed. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, 70 (studies under Germanus) and II.7, ed. Bieler, 118 (reporting his death at 120 years); Tírechán gives other figures in *The Patrician Texts*, II.2, ed. Bieler, 123.

⁸⁰ *Ratio*, ed. Semmler, 90: 'Qui habuerunt in eorum monasterio monachos cerciter tres millia.' Cf. *Vita Comgalli* 43, ed. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2.7: 'Et maxima multitudo monachorum ibi venit ad sanctum Comgallum, ut non potuissent esse in uno loco. Et in diuersis cellis et monasteriis tria milia monachorum sub cura sancti patris Comgalli fueunt. Set maior et nominacior ceteris locis predictum monasterium Beannchor est, ubi clara ciuitas in honore sancti Comgalli edificata est.' ('And a great multitude of monks came there to Comgall, so that they could not stay in one place. And there were 3,000 monks in different cells and monasteries under the care of holy father Comgall. But greater and more renowned than other places was the monastery of Bangor where a distinguished community was established in honour of St Comgall.')

earth and many monasteries were founded from their teaching, as much as of men as of young women.’ Through the efforts of Columbanus to work with Merovingian rulers (in particular royal women), his Rule would be followed across Gaul over the seventh century, as at Jouarre (629–36), Solignac (632), Rebais (636), Sens (660), Corbie (659), Chelles (660), Soissons (667), Montrierender (692), Flavigny (721), and Murbach (728).⁸¹ ‘Thus there was a beginning under blessed Columbanus of what previously Mark the evangelist had chanted.’ The author then claims: ‘If you do not believe us, look into the Life of Columbanus and of blessed abbot Eustasius [his successor as abbot of Luxeuil] and you will find more fully in the sayings of blessed Attala, abbot of Bobbio.’⁸² Whereas the *Vita Samsonis* was recording the beginning of a British mission to the Continent, the *Ratio de cursu* celebrated the massive expansion of an Irish-inspired monastic network, initiated by Columbanus, that connected abbeys like Corbie, Luxeuil, and Bobbio, across Francia to northern Italy.

Who was *Wandilocus*, the companion of Columbanus, mentioned in the *Ratio*? Bernard Merdrignac suggested that he might be *Windiwaleus*, or Guénolé, founding abbot of Landévennec abbey in the extreme west of Brittany.⁸³ The major problem with this argument, however, is that neither Comgall nor Columbanus is mentioned in the surviving Life of this saint (from the late ninth century), which describes him as a British prince (*ca* 460–532) who fled from Cornwall to Brittany in the late fifth century, a hundred years before Comgall and Columbanus.⁸⁴ Another possible candidate is the Waldolenus (*ob. ca* 625) mentioned by Columbanus in the letter that he wrote in 610 from Nantes as a figure to be respected at Luxeuil.⁸⁵ Semmler doubted that he could be Waldelenus, the son of Amalgair, duke of Lower Burgundy and perhaps the first abbot of Bézé.⁸⁶ This Waldolenus is mentioned as a disciple of Columbanus in the Life of Walaric or Valerie (*ob.* 622), a monk of Luxeuil whom Columbanus encouraged to become a preacher and who helped Walaric to establish an abbey at Leuconay (St-Valéry-sur-Somme). This strategic location, from which the Normans crossed over to England in 1066, stood on land near Amiens, given him by Chlothar II.⁸⁷ Just as Dol was useful for those travelling to the Continent from south-west Britain, so Leuconay was well located to demonstrate to English travellers from Canterbury the continuing strength of the Irish monastic tradition in

⁸¹ On the expansion of Luxeuil’s traditions across Gaul, see Ganz, ‘Texts and scripts in surviving manuscripts in the script of Luxeuil’, and the essays in Clarke and Brennan (edd.), *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, with a useful map in Riché, ‘Columbanus, his followers and the Merovingian Church’, 60.

⁸² For the *Vitae* of Eustasius and Attala, see the editions of Krusch, *Passiones*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, 5.240–57 and 230–40.

⁸³ Merdrignac, ‘Saint Guénolé et les monachismes insulaire’; see Barbet-Massin, *L’Enluminure*, 472–4.

⁸⁴ La Borderie, *Le Cartulaire de Landévennec*, 1–119.

⁸⁵ Columbanus, Epistola 4, ed. Walker, 26–8: ‘Waldolenus sit prepositus ... et semper tene Waldolenum’. This identity was mentioned by Gougaud, ‘Celtiques (liturgies)’, col. 2990 and by Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland*, 687–8. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, xxiv, assumes that the Waldolenus mentioned by Columbanus as being prior at Luxeuil is the nephew of Waldelenus the Elder, Duke of Upper Burgundy.

⁸⁶ Semmler, in a note to *Ratio de cursu*, page 89: ‘frustra investigavi’. The brother of Amalgair was the elder Waldelenus, duke of upper Burgundy. Barbet-Massin mentions this possibility, *L’Enluminure*, 472–3.

⁸⁷ *Acta Sanctorum*, April I.4, cols 18–20; *Vita Walarici abbatis Leucanoensis*, ed. Krusch, *Passiones*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, 4.164–5.

the seventh century. Given the evident connections of the *Ratio* and the adjoining chronicle to Corbie, founded from Luxeuil later in the seventh century, its author, certainly from the network of abbeys established by Columbanus, could be from this part of the world. Its author was having to justify the apostolic authority of both Irish and Gallican liturgical traditions, against those who wished to assert the customs of Rome.

In appealing to the writings of Eustasius, an early abbot of Luxeuil, the author of the *Ratio* clearly knew about the controversy that had flared up at Luxeuil, following the death of Columbanus, between Eustasius and Agrestius, a monk of that abbey who had been denied permission to preach by Columbanus, but had made links with Lombard princes. The conflict led to a synod being convened at Mâcon in 626 to assess the dispute.⁸⁸ Among the criticisms made by Agrestius were peculiarly Irish habits (like making the sign of the cross) and an excessive multiplication of prayers in the liturgy, to which Eustasius responded: ‘Who can deny that the multiplication of prayers in holy offices is of much benefit, since nothing is more salubrious for any Christian and particularly for penitents than to beseech God with assiduous multiplication of requests and prayers?’⁸⁹ The criticisms made by Agrestius, who sided with the Gallican episcopate, reveal a measure of distrust towards the liturgy of Columbanus.

The treatise concludes with brief accounts of three other forms of liturgy. One was an Eastern tradition diffused by Chromatius, Heliodorus, Paulinus, and Athanasius, followed by St Macharius, and which divided the office into twelve parts, one for each hour. Columbanus mentions this practice, described by Cassian as followed by some Egyptian monks.⁹⁰ Another was composed by Ambrose to counter heretical (Arian) liturgy ‘that used to be sung in Italy’, as if this was no longer the case.⁹¹ The last liturgical practice, mentioned only very briefly, is one composed by Benedict: ‘little discordant in detail from the Roman *cursus*, which you will find written in his Rule’. The *Ratio* identifies no apostolic authority for Benedict’s practice, other than Gregory’s statement in his *Dialogues* that it was permitted as a privilege for monks, as Benedict was unable to teach other than the way he lived.⁹² The fact that this author assigns no apostolic authority to any of these three liturgies implies that he considered none was as well founded as those of the Gauls or of the Irish.

Conclusion

Both the first Life of Samson and the *Ratio de cursu* emphasise the apostolic authority of their liturgical traditions in a way that suggests a conscious effort to dispel potential criticism. Yet they do so in different ways, reflecting subtle changes in the evolution of Celtic practice between the sixth century, when Samson arrived

⁸⁸ On this debate see Dumézil, ‘L’affaire Agrestius de Luxeuil’.

⁸⁹ *Vita Columbani*, 2.9, ed. Krusch, *Passiones*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, 4.126: ‘Multiplicationem orationum in sacris officiis: Orationum multiplicationem in sacris officiis multum prodesse quis neget. Cum nihil cuius Christiano et maxime poenitentibus salubrius sit quam Deum multiplicatione precum et orationum assiduitate pulsare?’

⁹⁰ *Ratio*, ed. Semmler, 90–1; see Cassian, *Institutiones* 2.2, ed. Petschenig, 18, and Columbanus, Rule, 7, ed. Walker, 132.

⁹¹ *Ratio*, ed. Semmler, 91.

⁹² Gregory, *Dialogi*, 2.36, ed. de Vogüé, 242.

in Brittany, and the mid-eighth century, when the author of the *Ratio* was having to defend traditions which he saw as going back to St Mark and Egypt, rather than to St Peter in Rome. The *Vita Samsonis*, a text that preserves memories of the saint collected by a member of his family, probably sometime in the seventh century, needed to assert his hero's stature as being as authoritative as that of any Gallo-Roman bishop. He recalled Samson's early visit to Ireland, probably to win favour in the eyes of Irish monastic communities established on the Continent by Columbanus, who may have seen himself as following in the missionary footsteps of Samson.⁹³ The *Vita Samsonis* was reminding its readers that the Irish owed their traditions to Britons like Samson, in the same way as Columbanus in the late sixth century appealed to the authority of two other Britons, Gildas and Finnian, when writing to Gregory, the first monk to be made pope. In the *Vita Samsonis* apostolic authority is invoked to assert the legitimacy of a figure remembered more as a charismatic bishop than as ruler of a diocese in an eighth-century fashion.

While Gregory the Great admired Benedict as a charismatic abbot, he never made an issue of enforcing strict liturgical uniformity in the way that was being demanded by some critics of Columbanus. Things changed after Gregory's death. By the 630s, Pope Honorius was seeking to impose uniformity in celebration of the date of Easter, troubled in particular by those many foundations of Columbanus on the Continent that continued to follow older traditions. Slowly, Gregory's name would be used to evoke the apostolicity of Rome rather than of the East or of Jerusalem. For the author of the *Vita Samsonis*, John and James were as important as Peter in symbolising the universal character of the apostles of Jesus. He mentions how Samson visited Ireland before travelling through Cornwall to Brittany, so as to show how he was continuing the Acts of the Apostles. He was proud of Samson's connections to both Britain and Ireland, showing that the saint established a precedent on which Columbanus would build. While the archbishop of Tours may have claimed authority over Dol in the sixth century, Samson's hagiographer was conscious that episcopal authority was established not just by St Peter, but also by James and John, each a representative of the universal Church.

The *Ratio de cursu* similarly celebrates the universality of the Church, arguing that the liturgy of the Irish is of apostolic authority matching that of the Gauls, but in a way that reflects more the concerns of the 730s or 740s than of the seventh century. Its author mentions only briefly the liturgies of the East, of Milan, and of St Benedict. Pope Gregory is mentioned only briefly in the final sentence, without any particular authority being accorded to Rome. As in the *Vita Samsonis*, the *Ratio* celebrates apostolic rather than Roman authority. It was produced by a monk with strong reverence for Irish tradition, although also with respect for the Gallican liturgy, and with an awareness of Patrick that is completely absent from the *Vita Samsonis*. The *Ratio* author revered not just Patrick and Columbanus, but an as yet unidentified *Wandilocus*. While he may be a Breton, he could also be Valdolenus, a disciple of Columbanus, who helped Walaric establish Leuconay (St-Valéry-sur-Somme) in the early seventh century. The *Ratio* could possibly emanate from Corbie, founded not far away by Merovingian royalty introducing monks from Luxeuil around 660, and which became a place where both Irish and Gallican liturgical customs were known and honoured.

⁹³ Cf. Wood on Samson and Columbanus above and Wooding on Samson as the first Insular *peregrinus* below.

The *Ratio* author is proud to maintain that the liturgy of the Irish derived – through Patrick and thus through Germanus and Lupus – from the monks of Lérins, who in turn inherited the traditions of the Egyptian desert. Those desert monks, he claimed, were following the apostolic example of Mark. He acknowledged that the Gallican liturgy also had apostolic authority, in that it derived from apostolic martyrs who connected to the line of St Peter and St John. While missionaries to Brittany in the early sixth century were chided by Gallican bishops in 511 for using portable altars and allowing women to distribute the chalice, Celtic traditions do seem to have continued to involve women and men in their liturgy. The *Ratio* implies that the *cursus Scottorum* involved both women and men singing the key prayers of the liturgy, namely the *Gloria*, the *Sanctus*, the Lord's Prayer, and the Great Amen. These were practices of collective singing known to Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours, but no longer tending to be followed by the Gallican Church in the seventh century. According to the *Ordines Romani*, these great prayers of the assembly had come to be recited either by clergy or by the priest alone.

Pressure to adopt Roman liturgical custom was already acute in many monastic communities across the Continent in the second quarter of the eighth century, following its being firmly established in England in the later seventh century. Barbet-Massin observes that the period between 731 and 755 witnessed the copying of many *Ordines Romani* at St Gall, originally an Irish foundation that became assiduous in its respect for Roman liturgy and the Rule of Benedict. She suggests that the *Ratio* may be responding in particular to a letter of Pope Innocent I to Decentius (sent in 416) that asserts the primacy of Rome in liturgical matters and that was copied into various seventh-century canonical collections, including the *Collectio Corbeiensis* in the early eighth century.⁹⁴ The *Ratio de cursus* seems to be written in response to a Romanising push, promoted by English missionaries. After the anointing of Pepin by the pope in 754, Roman liturgy became the vehicle by which a new dynasty could assert its power. In England and Germany, a key figure in promoting Roman practice was Boniface, an English missionary in Germany.⁹⁵ In England, the synod of Clovesho in 747 insisted on liturgical uniformity with Roman practice, providing a precedent for Pepin to do likewise. Conceivably from the second quarter of the eighth century, the *Ratio* may also be responding to the claims being made by Chrodogang of Metz (*ob.* 766) that both Irish and Gallican liturgy were not as authentic as the liturgy preserved in Rome. The anthology containing the *Ratio* was revised around 768, just as Charlemagne was coming to power in Gaul and implementing his father's policy of introducing Roman liturgy over older Irish and Gallican liturgies.

By comparison, the first *Vita Samsonis* recalls an earlier world. It shows no evidence of being influenced by the debates around the authority of Roman liturgy that became so contested in England in the later seventh and early eighth centuries. By contrast, it is concerned to promote the legitimacy of Samson as a bishop of comparable status to the established bishops in the major sees of Gaul in the seventh century. The *Vita Samsonis* singles out the importance of Samson's being authorised by a vision of three apostles, Peter, James, and John, representing the universal Church, as established at the Council of Nicaea, rather than specifically Petrine authority. The *Ratio de cursus* shares a similar perspective to the *Vita Samsonis* in that it looks back to what it calls the liturgy of the Irish (*cursus Scottorum*), whose

⁹⁴ Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure*, 478–81, and 'The tract *Ratio de cursus*' (n.46 above).

⁹⁵ On the impact of Boniface on the Continent in these decades, see Levison, *England and the Continent*, 70–86.

lineage it traced back, through Patrick and Germanus, to Cassian and the monks of Egypt, and ultimately to St Mark. The *Ratio* devoted attention to showing how the Gallican liturgy traced its links back to both Rome and Ephesus, but dwelt much more briefly with the liturgical traditions of the East, of Milan, and of Rome as promoted in the Rule of Benedict. Comparing the first Life of Samson to the *Ratio* allows us to glimpse the evolution of ecclesiastical culture on the Continent between the composition of the Life (perhaps in the later seventh century) and the mid-eighth century. The *Ratio* was composed at a time when the Rule of Benedict was becoming promoted as an authoritative text that required the observance of a Roman liturgy. By 782, the English deacon Alcuin would establish himself at Tours as an adviser to Charlemagne. By the ninth century, it would be necessary to produce a new Life of Samson at Dol, different again in that it had to be more attuned to the reality of Carolingian power in Brittany and the spiritual authority of Rome.⁹⁶

*Appendix: Explanation of the Liturgies, about who have been its authors*⁹⁷

If we look carefully at the authors, we find that in the beginning singing was not as some inexpert people claim with false and varied objection, and as many still try to claim.

Blessed Trophimus, bishop of Arles, and St Pothinus, martyr and bishop of Lyons, disciple of St Peter the apostle, transmitted the Roman liturgy among the Gauls, as Josephus and Eusebius of Caesarea have reported. Hence, later, by the report of the martyr blessed Pothinus, imprisoned with forty-eight martyrs in a hovel, it was transmitted to blessed Clement IV, successor of the see of blessed Peter the apostle, and blessed Clement ordained blessed Irenaeus as bishop; you may find this in the book of the holy Irenaeus, bishop and martyr, who was brought up by blessed Polycarp of Smyrna, bishop and martyr, who was himself a disciple of the apostle John, as the historian Josephus and the bishop Irenaeus in his book report.

John the Evangelist chanted the first liturgy in Gaul, then later blessed Polycarp, disciple of saint John, then Irenaeus, who was the third bishop of Lyons of Gaul, sung this liturgy among the Gauls. From there, they composed reciprocal antiphons and responsories or chants [*sonus*] and *Allelulias* as a flow in modulations of the writings of the New and Old Testament, not from their own writings, but from the sacred scriptures. And the order of the Church, namely the liturgy of the Gauls, travelled through the whole world and was diffused through the entire globe, which blessed Jerome the priest ordained; it was not, as many think, a certain Gallican or British cleric, given to modulation, who published it – which he never did.

Hence the other liturgy, which is said at the present time to be of the Irish, which they claim by false opinion, in fact blessed Mark the evangelist published. He preached throughout Egypt and Italy, as Josephus and Eusebius report in the fourth book. As a result, all people, as much men as women, sang every *Sanctus* and *Gloria in excelsis deo* or Lord's Prayer and *Amen*, so great was the united preaching. And blessed Jerome affirms that he [Mark] later proclaimed the gospel in Italy through the mouth of Peter the apostle. The liturgy which at the present time is said to be Irish, blessed Mark chanted and after him Gregory Nazianzene, whom Jerome affirms

⁹⁶ On the production of this new Life, see Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', 15.

⁹⁷ This translation of the *Ratio de cursu qui fuerunt eius auctores* is based on the edition by Semmler, in *Initia consuetudinis Benedictinae*, ed. Hallinger, 77–91.

was his teacher. And blessed Basil, brother of St Gregory himself, Anthony, Paul, Macharius, and John and Malchus chanted it according to the order of the Fathers. Hence, later blessed Cassian, who had as a companion blessed Honoratus and after him, blessed Honoratus, the first abbot, and St Caesarius, bishop in Arles, and blessed abbot Porcarius, who was in that monastery, chanted this liturgy. Blessed Lupus and blessed Germanus, a monk in their monastery, held to it. And they themselves chanted this liturgy in the same place under the norm of the Rule, and later they acquired the greatest honour in the seat of their bishopric out of reverence for their holiness, and later they preached in Britain or Ireland, as affirm the Life of blessed Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, and the Life of blessed Lupus. They taught blessed Patrick sacred letters spiritually and nourished him and made this bishop archbishop in Ireland and Britain. He lived for 153 years and sang this liturgy in the same place and after him, blessed Uuandilocus senior, and blessed Comogillus, who had as a monk in their monastery around three thousand people. Hence blessed Uuandilocus was sent by blessed Gomogillus in the service of preaching, and [he and] blessed Columbanus were sent to the regions of Gaul, to the monastery of Luxeuil, and in that place they chanted that liturgy. And thence, this later increased the form of their holiness through the whole globe of the earth and many monasteries were founded from their teaching, as much as of men as of young women. And hence arose the beginning under blessed Columbanus of what previously blessed Mark had chanted. And if you do not believe us, look in the life of blessed Columbanus and of blessed abbot Eustasius, and you will find this out more fully, as also in the sayings of blessed Arthletus, abbot of Ebouensis.

There is another Eastern liturgy published by holy Chromatius and Heliodorus and blessed Paulinus and bishop Athanasius, which is not followed in the custom of the Gauls, which St Macharius chanted; this is in twelves, namely at each hour.

There is another liturgy which blessed Augustine reports that blessed Ambrose composed as different to the order of the heretics, which was previously sung in Italy.

There is another liturgy of blessed Benedict, which is only a little different from the Roman liturgy, which you will find written in his Rule. But blessed Gregory, pontiff of the city of Rome, affirms by his authority in the Life of St Benedict in the Book of Dialogues that it is like a privilege for monks, where he says: The holy man was not able to teach otherwise than as blessed Benedict himself lived.

THE REPRESENTATION OF EARLY BRITISH MONASTICISM
AND PEREGRINATIO IN *VITA PRIMA S. SAMSONIS*

Jonathan M. Wooding

Vita Prima Sancti Samsonis is a text of great interest for writing the early history of the Church in Celtic Britain.¹ It appears to be dateable to before the advent (probably in the eighth century) of contemporary records in the Welsh chronicles and to be earlier than any extant British Lives of saints; it is also, clearly, witness to older hagiographical records from Britain that are now lost.² The text of the *Vita Prima* (hereafter *VIS*) having been transmitted on the Continent, its contents – and by extension older sources it may incorporate – existed independently of revisions of Welsh ecclesiastical sources that occurred in the early second millennium AD.³ *VIS* can hence act as a window on an obscure but formative period of Welsh Church history. Its anonymous author (hereafter the ‘Samson-author’), unusually among Continental hagiographers of Insular saints, was inspired to retrace personally his subject’s journey back across the sea, providing us with a series of detailed descriptions of life at monasteries in different parts of Britain. In *VIS* he sets out a narrative of the progression of a monk into, ultimately, self-exile (*peregrinatio*) from his own country – a practice rarely identified with the early British Church.⁴ The detail is sometimes remarkable. There are vivid glimpses into processes of memory concerning early holy men, as well as description of sensory experiences such as listening to texts (Prol.2, I.1, I.42) and physical detail of how saints were revered at individual places (I.41, I.48). Although it is often challenging to interpret, there can be no doubt as to the great value of *VIS* as a source. Indeed, it may even be

¹ I owe many debts in writing this contribution. Above all to Karen Jankulak, for advice on all points and for reading a draft, to its great benefit. Also to Lynette Olson for conversations on Samson over a period of three decades. Br David Hodges and Fr Gildas Gage of Caldey Island Monastery have discussed monasticism, Caldey and Samson with me over a number of years. My daughter Aoife Wooding was my intrepid companion in walking the Saints’ Way, while Oliver Padel and Isobel Harvey very kindly offered transport and hospitality to tired travellers at the end. I would also like to thank Caroline Brett, Constant Mews and John O. Ward for much encouragement. I am solely responsible for any errors.

² For a recent authoritative account of issues of the earliest Welsh historical chronicles see Guy, ‘The origins’, 25–45. On the sources represented in *VIS* see most recently Poulin, *L’hagiographie*, 313–20; Sowerby, ‘The Lives’, 1–31, 25–30.

³ Davies, *Patterns*, 4–7; *VIS* was redacted into the Book of Llandaff, but the text is also preserved independently of this: Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, esp. 63–75; Davies, ‘The cult’, 37–55.

⁴ Dumville, ‘Some British aspects’, 21.

that its unusual character sometimes inspires us to ask the wrong questions and find ambiguity where clarity is actually to be found.

My focus in the following discussion will be primarily upon the witness of *VIS* to monasticism. Chapters 1–52 of book I of *VIS* (which make up approximately two-thirds of the whole work) constitute a distinctly monastic narrative of initiation, in which Samson is formed through his progressive encounter with different iterations of the monastic ideal, across a number of different locations in Britain, before abandoning his country of origin altogether. In this progression Samson is shown to evince a tension between stability and mobility that is inherent in monastic theology; this tension is famously symbolised in the Rule of St Benedict – a contemporary of Samson – whose favoured monk ‘binds himself to stability’ (‘*stabilitatem suam firmare*’), but also is one ‘who is hastening to the perfection of monastic life’ (‘*ad perfectionem conversationis qui festinat*’).⁵ Samson is driven by a strong desire to live an ascetic life, but submits to the rule of his abbot. Rather like the twentieth-century monk Thomas Merton, Samson becomes in *VIS* a heroic figure both for his submission to authority *and* for his personal drive to perfect an eremitical vocation.⁶ Richard Sowerby has observed that Samson’s holiness in *VIS* is often promoted less by his own deeds than by his associations with other holy people.⁷ Deriving holiness by ‘mutual confidence’ with other monks is a particular motif of monastic biography.⁸ Samson is not always a charitable monk and his humble acceptance of the judgement of others (I.10, I.24, I.46) is to be seen as an indicator of his holiness, especially when it tempers his extremes of asceticism. *VIS* is thus not simply a work concerned with the career of a saint who happened to be a monk. Monasticism is central to its narrative conception and Samson may be seen as a heroic figure for his humility and submission to authority – for abstaining from the resistance to constraints placed upon his ambitions that we would expect from a secular hero. This seems to suppose an audience who understood monasticism and valued its particular take upon the heroic.

The monastic content of the text cannot be said to have been overlooked in previous studies. Studies by Richard Sharpe and Ian Wood in particular have identified significant points of comparison of *VIS* with other early British sources on monasticism – for example in works by Gildas and Finnian;⁹ Wood, indeed, observes that the ‘main concerns of the Life of Samson are, in fact, monastic rather than episcopal’.¹⁰ Wendy Davies has made thoughtful use of *VIS* in distinguishing the roles of bishops and abbots in early Wales.¹¹ Sowerby, in an important recent study, has also identified the foundations of monasteries (I.52) in *VIS* as nodal points in its narrative.¹² These observations, however, still can be seen as occurring in a specific historiographical context of retreat from an older, ‘Celtic Church’ paradigm.

⁵ *Rule of St Benedict*, chs 61 and 73, ed. Fry, *The Rule*, 275–6, 294–5. The former phrase is older than Benedict, being also in the *Regula Magistri*.

⁶ My comparison here is with the famous autobiography of Merton (1915–68), *The Seven-Story Mountain*, which made widely popular his narrative of experiences of different aspects of the monastic life and struggle to find his own role as a hermit in a strict monastic order.

⁷ Sowerby, ‘The Lives’, 5.

⁸ Chitty, *The Desert*, 1.

⁹ See for discussion of the monastic concern of the text: Sharpe, ‘Gildas’, 196–9; Wood, ‘Forgery’, 380–1; Wood, ‘Britain’, 77–8.

¹⁰ Wood, ‘Forgery’, 380.

¹¹ Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, 146–9.

¹² Sowerby, ‘The Lives’, 28.

In the revisionist approaches to this problem much attention has been paid to defining what monasticism was *not*; namely, that it was not a vehicle for primary church-planting and not a direct substitute for secular pastoral care networks.¹³ Having liberated monasticism from its conflation with secular pastoral activity, it is probably fair to say that most scholarship subsequently has touched rather less upon what monasticism actually was. Sharpe and Wood, in studies written in the 1980s, linked Samson's zeal for an austere monastic life to a narrative of reform in the Insular churches.¹⁴ The worlds of monks and secular christians were admittedly not discrete. Samson is reminded by Piro that even the ascetic should have concern for the souls of secular people (I.24); monasticism certainly contributed significantly to pastoral care structures in early medieval Wales.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the social historiography of late antique studies,¹⁶ and the desires of institutional history,¹⁷ along with the legacy of conflation of monasticism with missionary travel in the 'saints and seaways' model (see below),¹⁸ have all tended to promote a conflation of secular causes with motivations for monasticism itself. As Peter Brown has noted in revision of his celebrated 'holy man' thesis, we may see the early christian 'holy man' in social terms, but the holy man's own concern was not with his 'social niche', but with "transformation" of his person, through a Spirit-filled ascetic discipline'.¹⁹ It is clear that Samson's ascetic discipline was perceived by the author of *VIS* (or his immediate sources) as a matter of outstanding interest in its own right.²⁰ The young Samson is represented as strikingly uninterested in secular pastoral concerns. He is only grudgingly drawn into pastoral care even of his own community. It is when he enters into exile from Britain that he appears to assume a genuinely pastoral role. Whatever the motivation lying behind it, a strong narrative of initiation and formation in the monastic life is central to the British episodes of *VIS*.²¹

Benchmarking dates, contexts and approaches

Before looking closely at *VIS*'s detail of monasticism it is helpful to define briefly some basic dates and contexts – although the reader is referred to other studies in this volume for more authoritative discussion of these matters. *VIS* has been dated as early as the first quarter of the seventh century and as late as the middle of the

¹³ Sharpe, 'Some problems', 230–70; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*.

¹⁴ In this they were probably influenced by a received 'reformist' narrative of Gildas's career. This narrative is derived by juxtaposing Gildas's statements in *De excidio Britanniae* and the *Fragmenta* (on which see further below) and reading these in terms of a career in which Gildas was presumed to have moved between secular and religious status: Herren, 'Gildas', 65–78; Dumville, 'The origins', 85–107, esp. 94–10; Chadwick, 'Gildas', 78–80.

¹⁵ Churches designated as *monasteria* were later central to pastoral provision – but we should be wary of seeing this as too early a development: Evans, 'The survival', 33–40; Blair, *The Church*, 345.

¹⁶ See Brown, 'The rise', *passim*.

¹⁷ Harvey & Jones, 'Custom', 223–33, at 228–9; also Harvey, 'Constructed landscapes', 231–48. In general on historical and diplomatic approaches to hagiography see: Fouracre, 'Merovingian history', 3–38, esp. 4–5; also Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises*, 65–97.

¹⁸ See discussion of the work of Bowen further below.

¹⁹ Brown, 'The rise', 370.

²⁰ I note here Richard Sowerby's suggestion that the Samson-author may at times have followed his own religious preoccupations, rather than those of any perceived audience: 'The Lives', 23.

²¹ Poulin, *L'hagiographie*, 313–20; Brett above; Sowerby, 'The Lives', 25–30.

ninth.²² In this paper I accept the dating which proceeds from the identification of one *Tigermal* (ob. 707) in the Lorsch Annals as Bishop *Tigernomalus*, the dedicatee of *VIS*.²³ I also accept the identification of Samson with the signatory of the same name to a Council of Paris in 556×573.²⁴ These dates situate Samson's *floruit* around the middle two quarters of the sixth century and the writing of *VIS* in the last decades of the seventh century, or the first decade of the eighth.

The career of Samson we will presume to fall early in the history of monasticism in western Britain, but not early in the history of christianity in Britain. His world was not likely to have been a primarily pagan one, despite the scene (*VIS* I.48) of pagan reversion in the district of *Tricurius*. Likewise, while he is described as a founder of churches in Brittany (I.9), we need not see Samson as being part of a secondary British 'mission' to Brittany, as earlier scholars such as E.G. Bowen and Nora Chadwick, for example, did.²⁵ Driving these earlier interpretations of the early Church in Britain and Ireland had been a vision of competing 'branches' of christianity. 'Secondary conversions' of territories were envisaged as led by monks, whose first settlements were sometimes imagined to be sites – missionary bridgeheads even – on the shoreline.²⁶ This vision of competing movements seems more apposite to the early modern period than the early medieval and is now mostly set aside, but it has left confusing legacies in historiography. We will see that these assumptions have certainly influenced past study of *VIS* and still exert influence in readings of some aspects. For the setting of *VIS* I will affirm the present orthodoxy that the British Church in which Samson worked was one formed out of a continuing Romano-British Church,²⁷ rejecting models in which a wholesale planting, or replanting, of churches was coincident with the advent of monasticism, around the fifth or sixth century.²⁸ These ideas form part of a 'western seaways' model that we will examine further below, in which we will identify a seminal role of *VIS* in the formation of this model.

In seeking to understand the monastic vision of the Samson-author, as well as the monastic environment of Samson himself, we will also consciously look outside the local context, on the assumption that Samson's monasticism was part of a larger conception. The past historiography of the early British Church has been too often characterised by what Owen Chadwick criticised as a 'remarkable assumption of abnormality', predicated on the belief that western Britain and Ireland were isolated and only in intermittent contact with the mainstream of the western Church.²⁹ In the case of monasticism the assumption of this premise has led to claims that British monasticism was a narrow offshoot of Egyptian or Gaulish monasticism, which we will see has influenced investigation of Samson's monasteries. It has inspired belief that Insular monasticism had distinct views on monastic *stabilitas* and *peregrinatio*,

²² Duine, *Questions*, 35; Wade-Evans, *Welsh Christian Origins*, 205; Sharpe, 'Martyrs', 85; Poulin, 'Hagiographie et politique'.

²³ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 19–21; also Jackson, *The Historical Phonology*, §§ 1007, 1010.

²⁴ Gaudemet & Basdevant (edd.), *Les canons*, 424–5.

²⁵ Guy, 'The Breton migration', 101–56; cf. Chadwick, *The Age*, 70–1, also Bowen, *Saints*, 165–9.

²⁶ On secondary conversion, see Sharpe, 'Martyrs', 96. On the shoreline sites see Wooding, 'Island and coastal churches'; Bowen, *Saints*, 68–9.

²⁷ See comprehensive historiographical survey in Sharpe, 'Martyrs', 94–102 – contrary view in Frend, 'Ecclesia Britannica', 129–44.

²⁸ Bowen, *Saints*, 62–70; Bowen, 'The travels of the Celtic saints', 22–8.

²⁹ Chadwick, 'The evidence', 175.

which also bear on readings of *VIS*.³⁰ Notwithstanding that there were regional differences, the monasticism in which Samson was formed is best interpreted by comparison with contemporary practice across Europe, on the basis that this arose from a shared tradition.³¹

We will now look in detail at *VIS*'s accounts of Samson's progress through stages in the monastic life and his associated experiences of different places in the process.³² This includes looking both at the sites in which he lived – or at least in which the Samson-author believed him to have lived – and at the symbolism that attaches to these sites and associated landscapes in the narrative of *VIS*. The different qualities of the life lived by Samson and others are of particular interest.

The beginning of Samson's monastic journey is his entry into education and first profession into the monastic life. Samson's parentage was in two kingdoms: his father from Dyfed and his mother from Gwent. *VIS* says that he was born in Dyfed (I.1). Dyfed and Gwent were both kingdoms that arose out of *civitates* of the Roman period that were themselves founded in earlier ethno-tribal groupings: the Demetae, with their capital at *Moridunum* (modern Carmarthen), and the Silures, with their capital at *Venta Silurium* (modern Caerwent).³³ In Samson's time these two kingdoms divided south Wales between them. The Samson-author describes Gwent as the next province (I.1) to Dyfed (*prouintia proxima eiusdem Demetie*), which is correct for Samson's time – and probably was still in the time of the Samson-author's visit. By ca 800 the territory between the Usk and the Towy was identified as a separate territory named Glywysing – later again as Morgannwg. The received interpretation is thus that in Samson's time Gwent had stretched as far west as the River Towy and that what became Glywysing was at that time in Gwent.³⁴ *VIS* says that both grandfathers were equal in status and role in their respective kingdoms.

Noble birth is normal for a Celtic saint in hagiography, and very possibly in reality. There seems to be no reason to doubt that the nobility of neighbouring kingdoms

³⁰ For examples of assumption of difference: Herren ('Gildas', 69) assumes that basic ideas in monasticism are not yet present in sixth-century Wales; Maribel Dietz, in a generally excellent study, highlights a distinct quality of Irish *peregrinatio*, arising from pre-Christian influences, but this should not distract from the broad similarity of the Irish phenomenon to that which she describes elsewhere: Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 26, 194–6; cf. O'Hara, 'Patria, peregrinatio and paenitentia', 116–17.

³¹ Viz. Claude Pfeifer *apud* Fry, *The Rule*, 85: 'despite the diversity of rules, the life actually lived in the Western monasteries from the end of the fourth century up to the sixth seems to have been basically the same ... The reason for this is the persistence of a common tradition, which was the determinant of monastic life much more than the rule was.' Lynette Olson (*Early Monasteries*, 1–2) is also one Insular historian who affirms the importance of the continuous existence of monasticism into the early British Church. In my reflections upon monasticism I would further like to acknowledge the inspiration of many visits to monastic houses in Wales and England, and of two of my former students who have traced early traditions of monasticism into the Irish Church: Jenkins, 'Holy, Holier, Holiest'; Rumsey, *Sacred Time*.

³² In what follows all my references, unless otherwise stated, will be to the edition of *VIS* by Flobert, *La Vie*, referenced by chapter.

³³ Charles-Edwards, *Wales*, 19–20.

³⁴ We should note the minority view of Alex Woolf, who, following a reference in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, has suggested instead that Glywysing emerged from a detached portion of Dyfed, which would place Llantwit Major in Dyfed in Samson's time: Woolf, 'The expulsion', 102–15.

intermarried.³⁵ When we consider details such as these we are, however, faced with the problem of distinguishing historical detail from what may be hagiographical motif. It might, for example, be a literary motif that parents of a saint would be from two neighbouring kingdoms; a similar motif is found in the very much later *Vita S. David* by Rhygyfarch (*ca* 1090), where David has parents from Ceredigion and Dyfed. In this, as in many details, we need to be aware that *VIS*, although often read fairly literally on account of its eyewitness element, is still a work of hagiography and has the limitations of that genre. This question is of course at issue in most of our treatment of detail in *VIS*. Sowerby has reasserted the idea that the Samson-author used a **Vita*, possibly written in Cornwall, with a very monastic flavour.³⁶ How much the detail of monasticism in *VIS* reflects the input of the underlying source and how much the perspective of the Samson-author is unclear. Another question at issue is whether *VIS*'s occasional vagueness as to geography reflects the Samson-author's desire to line up stages in Samson's life to match symbolic progressions in a literary model – such as Caroline Brett has proposed with respect to the *Vita S. Paterni* – or perhaps a theological symbolism, such as I will identify in *VIS*.³⁷ We cannot resolve all these general issues of approach in the present discussion, although other contributors to this volume may well shed further light on these issues. In many cases we will be able to assess the evidence of different episodes only on a case-by-case basis.

Samson's monasteries I: Illtud's monastery

Samson (*VIS*, I.7) is sent at a young age to study with St Eltutus, under whom he makes his profession into the monastic life. Eltut(us) is an earlier form of the name 'Illtud',³⁸ and we presume this to be the earliest reference to the saint of that name – albeit Illtud is a somewhat elusive, even contradictory, historical figure.³⁹ The Illtud of *VIS* is a saint firmly connected to a Roman past. He is educated in the arts of 'rhetoricae, grammaticaeque et arithmeticae' (I.7). He is claimed to have been ordained by Germanus of Auxerre, although this is difficult to reconcile with the chronology of *VIS*.⁴⁰

Illtud and his monastery evince diverse elements of monastic practice and education, amongst which Samson finds his own particular sources of inspiration. Illtud's monastery has one foot firmly in the secular world. It is not isolated from society and Illtud's relations as abbot involve patronage of his genetic as well as his monastic family (I.14). By the time of his relocation to the *insula* of Piro, after a considerable number of years, Samson has come to the view that this monastery is 'riotous and wasteful' ('tumultuosum et expensiosum') (I.20).

³⁵ Wyn Evans explains David's parentage as reconciling cults in the two regions, but whether, by comparison, Samson had a widespread cult by *ca* AD 700 must be doubted: Evans, 'St David', 15–16; on the cult of Samson see Karen Jankulak below.

³⁶ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 25–8.

³⁷ See Brett above. It is worth making the point that theological symbolism need not be only literary and *post facto*. Symbolism is often found in the monastic life as lived.

³⁸ Jackson, *Language*, 307.

³⁹ See comprehensive discussion in Doble, *Lives of the Welsh Saints*, 88–145; also Bartrum, *A Welsh Classical Dictionary*, 438–41; Davies, 'The saints', 379–80.

⁴⁰ For dating of the death of Germanus, which is variously placed in the 430s and 440s, see Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, 55–70.

Illtud, as we have already noted, is a man of classical, not simply monastic, education. However, as Karen Jankulak has observed, the learning claimed for Illtud in classical arts is not matched in the programme of Samson's learning under him, which is mainly biblical exegesis and detailed knowledge of the Psalms (I.10–11).⁴¹ Samson's programme is thus, by contrast (an implicit contrast but nevertheless a striking one), a very narrowly monastic one of study. Samson climbs a 'spiritual ladder' (*scala spiritualis*) (I.13), apparently, as opposed to an intellectual one.⁴² Rather than seeing this as a disjunction in the detail of the text, we should understand it as a deliberate, if silent, contrast. Samson is from the outset more concerned with asceticism than with secular learning or life and this point is established by a number of separate incidents. Samson's father, we are told, had initially been persuaded that clerical learning was inappropriate to a child of court officials, who were educators in secular values (I.6). A warning in a vision convinces him that Samson should go to Illtud's school (I.7). Samson, given the chance, unsentimentally parts with his secular family (I.10). Later, when living with Piro, Samson even compares life with his earthly family with the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt (see below). Illtud's monastery, if connected with the world, is nonetheless one in which all monks practise fasts, vigils, and penances under the guidance of the abbot. Samson (I.10) 'exercised himself in the very frequent fasts and the longer vigils which were kept by all the brothers who lived there' ('ieiuniis frequentissimis uigilis proxilioribus prae omnibus fratribus ibidem habitantibus sese exercebat'). Samson is drawn to ascetic practices and this is not incompatible with Illtud's community. Samson causes concern with the extent of his fasting, but not because austere fasting would be discouraged per se, only because, as Illtud advises, fasting must be moderated by age as well as by fitness, and Samson strives to take on fasting appropriate to an adult (I.10). This reflects what is generally found in contemporary monastic rules.⁴³

If Samson seems in this period of his life to be restless, even inclined to test authority, his individuality in ascetic practice needs to be understood in the context of what was considered normal. In early monasticism there was great potential for variety of practice between houses and even within them. Until the later first millennium there were no monastic 'orders' to give monasticism a corporate character. Each monastic house in the early middle ages usually had a particular spiritual tone (*charism*) which was defined with reference to the teachings of its founder along with other sources, such as rules of famous abbots; the latter were not, however, made normative, but, rather, used alongside the rule of the founder.⁴⁴ Differences between communities were mostly expressed in terms not of complete abstinence from particular things, but of degrees of abstinence. When Gildas, a contemporary of Samson (see below), criticises an anonymous group or movement of British monks for excessive fasting and vigils (for which see below), it is not – *pace* Michael Herren – because he believes fasts or vigils are inessential but, rather, because he feels a particular contemporary group of British monks were doing them

⁴¹ Jankulak, 'The absent saint', 209.

⁴² See also Lapidge, 'Gildas's education', 32–3, 47–50.

⁴³ See *Rule of St Benedict*, ch.39; even the austere community of St David made allowances for age and infirmity, *Vita S. David*, ch.24.

⁴⁴ St Benedict's Rule was one of these, but not treated as normative until the reform movements of the later first millennium. For an Insular example, see *Vita S. Cuthberti auctore anonymo*, III.1 (ed. Colgrave, 94–7), where it is described how at Lindisfarne Cuthbert's rule of life is observed 'along with the Rule of Benedict' (*cum regula Benedicti obseruamus*).

in the wrong spirit.⁴⁵ Monks should not present their own practices as an implicit rebuke to less ascetic communities. Breaking fasts for major feasts is liturgically important, as the events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are more important for salvation than are one's own efforts at holiness.

The parable in *VIS* is to illustrate that there are few zero-sum strictures and that asceticism requires judgement and submission to guidance. Some aspects of worldly life, such as sexual acts, are abstained from permanently. Others, such as eating meat or drinking alcohol, are frequently allowed outside periods of fasting.⁴⁶ Illtud's community keep long vigils and fasts, and these can cause problems unless these aspects of life in the community are regulated by a wise abbot (I.10).⁴⁷ Samson does not always agree with his master's vision, but is reluctant to go against him, out of respect (I.20) – waiting until Illtud is guided by God to permit him to follow a different way (I.21). In all of this Samson exemplifies a very important feature of monastic life: that dispensation is allowed in observance of rules, if done with the love (*caritas*) which binds a community and in stable life under the rule of an abbot.⁴⁸ Samson is often presented as being different to his fellows in his practices, and occasionally at odds with them. While in Illtud's monastery and subsequently, he is said to abstain from consumption of meat and poultry – he may hence have eaten fish, although this is not explicit (I.15). These abstinences, *VIS* implies, may not have been the general rule under Illtud, but possibly a choice of Samson himself. He appears to have consumed alcohol when not fasting, but the Samson-author stresses his moderation in this (I.15).⁴⁹ Piro, a more ascetic figure than Illtud, does not moderate his own drinking, which indeed leads to his death (I.36), but even then *VIS* does not present this as fatal to the character of the community that he led.⁵⁰

Of particular interest in interpreting the life in Illtud's and Piro's monasteries are some sources from early medieval Britain that focus on notably similar questions to *VIS*. One of these is the fragmentary survival of a correspondence (hereafter *Fragmenta*) between Gildas and one *Vinniau*. The latter was most likely the same *Vinnianus* who wrote the earliest Hiberno-Latin manual of penance and probably also the saint commemorated as St Finnian of Movilla.⁵¹ These two monastic authorities were almost certainly contemporaries of Samson.⁵² We will also reference

⁴⁵ Cf. Herren, 'Gildas', 69.

⁴⁶ Casel, *The Mystery*, 63–5. See, for example, the Hiberno-Latin 'Second Synod of St Patrick', ch.14, which contrasts 'Novatians', who fast constantly, with Christians who observe *locus et tempus et persona* in their practices. This probably sixth-century text is close to the theology of Gildas's *Fragmenta* and *VIS*. For discussion of the text with reference to aspects of *VIS* see Hughes, 'Synodus', 141–7. The text is edited by Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 184–97.

⁴⁷ Again see 'Second Synod of St Patrick', ch.3.

⁴⁸ It has been customary to see the Benedictine conception of *stabilitas* as in conflict with the mobility of the early British and Irish Churches (Hughes, 'The changing theory', 145). Monks who travelled with approval of abbots, however, such as when Samson relocates to live with Piro, were not 'wandering'. Again see 'Second Synod of St Patrick', ch.21.

⁴⁹ Also compare *Rule of St Benedict*, ch.40, where indeed drinking is noted as a matter unsuited to simple controls, but moderation is encouraged. This is more or less describes Samson's approach.

⁵⁰ Though Guibert of Nogent, early in the twelfth century, saw Piro's drunkenness as contemptible: *De sanctis et eorum pignoribus*, for discussion see Smith, 'Oral and written', 309.

⁵¹ *Fragmenta*, ed. & transl. Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 80–2 and 143–5; Penitential of Finnian, ed. & transl. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 74–94. On Finnian see Dumville, 'St Finnian', 71–84.

⁵² See the useful summary of dating issues concerning Gildas in Stancliffe, 'The thirteen sermons', 177–81.

here another – in this case Irish – source, the ‘Second Synod of Patrick’, which also compares closely with the monastic practice highlighted in *VIS*.⁵³ Another putatively early source is Rhygyfarch ap Sulien (*ob.* 1099), who, although he lived five hundred years later, used in his *Vita S. David* an early monastic rule which he apparently found at St Davids.⁵⁴ This is so close in some of its phrases to the *Fragmenta* as to suggest that Gildas knew a copy of the same rule or a very closely related one; John Morris and David Dumville have plausibly argued that Gildas’s strictures were directed, anonymously, at St David himself.⁵⁵ St David was a contemporary of Samson.⁵⁶ Aspects of *VIS* can also be compared closely with the *Fragmenta*. Richard Sharpe observes that:

It is remarkable how closely one may draw the comparison: the rich and powerful church of Illtud, the important Dyfrig apparently travelling round his territory, the *luxuria* of Piro’s monastery by contrast with Samson’s search for the desert, the latter’s asceticism and his founding of monasteries devoted to a stricter rule. Much of Samson’s career could be seen as illustrating the trend advocated by Gildas.⁵⁷

Gildas in the *Fragmenta* sets up a clear contrast between monks in what we may term ‘society-facing’ communities and those who live in more austere, ascetic communities. He implies that in his time asceticism was a trend which drew monks away from a moderate life into one in which some – those that are identified with David’s rule – kept long vigils and constant fasts (*Fragmenta* 3). These acts, Gildas implies, are vain as well as exhibitionist. Piro’s community could be seen as part of this ascetic enthusiasm, but its practices are evidently not as extreme as those targeted in the *Fragmenta*, nor conducted in such apparent vanity. The ascetic monks targeted by Gildas have contempt for abbots who own cattle and ride in carriages (*Fragmenta* 4), they favour commoners over nobility (*Fragmenta* 3); they are hence opposed to social hierarchy and its indicators and see abstinence as simply more virtuous than consumption. Gildas highlights the corrosive effects of such monastic practice when it is uncharitable. The abbots whom Gildas implicitly defends are ones who might keep carriages and cattle (*Fragmenta* 4) because this allows them status and influence in secular society – or, in the case of carriages, if necessary for travel by an older or infirm man, which would be consistent with general provisions in monastic rules to adjust practice for age and condition. In *VIS* the ‘worldly’ quality of a monastery is illustrated differently to Gildas’s examples, by the long story of Illtud’s nephews, who are jealous of the possibility that Samson’s holiness might in the future give him claims to the abbacy, which they see as their birthright (I.14, 16–19).⁵⁸ A later reference (I.47) to Samson’s travel across Cornwall in a cart could, however, be a reference to Gildas’s example. According to *VIS*, Samson implicitly favours a more ascetic life than does Gildas, but the two men are apparently of

⁵³ See n.46 above.

⁵⁴ *Vita S. David*, ch.66, edd. Sharpe and Davies, 152–3; the rule of David is set out at *Vita S. David*, chs 21–31.

⁵⁵ Morris, ‘The dates’, 349–50; Dumville, *St David*, 12.

⁵⁶ Wooding, ‘The figure’, 1–2.

⁵⁷ Sharpe, ‘Gildas’, 199.

⁵⁸ This episode reflects the common situation in Insular monasticism, in which succession in houses favoured, though not exclusively, members of particular kin-groups who were the proprietors of the monastery. Consider, for example, the case of Iona, in which five out of the first nine abbots were kinsmen of the founder.

one mind on the importance of humility. Samson is pulled back from extremes of asceticism and, in doing so, even accepts the judgements of figures whom he regards as presiding over lax rule (Illtud), and who are depicted as weak in character (Piro) and self-confessedly following a laxer rule (Viniavus). This is consistent with Gildas's (*Fragmenta* 4) strictures.

The physical location of Samson's monasteries is important for understanding the narrative of monasticism in *VIS*. None of the monasteries in which he resided is locatable with absolute certainty, although strong candidates can be identified for some. Illtud's 'magnificent monastery' is one of these and is generally understood to be Llantwit Major, in the Vale of Glamorgan.⁵⁹ This is in the region that would later become Glywysing (see above). As we have already noted, Illtud in *VIS* is a figure with strong links to a Roman past and education. Glamorgan-Gwent is the type of environment in which we could expect to find such a figure. The surrounding landscape contains some of the most productive agricultural land in south Wales.⁶⁰ In the vicinity are a number of Roman villas and early religious sites.⁶¹ Around 50 km east of Llantwit Major is Caerleon, which is commemorated as a shrine to two martyrs (Aaron and Iulius) of the Roman period, referred to by Gildas.⁶² At Llandough, 25 km to the south-east of Llantwit Major, a Roman villa and a post-Roman cemetery are found adjacent to a medieval parish church.⁶³ Llancarfan, clearly an important early church-site which produced a substantial pre-Norman archive, is around 10 km from Llantwit Major.⁶⁴ Dubricius (Dyfrig), who features in *VIS*, is also a figure associated with Gwent and this might seem to bear upon our attempts to locate his monastery. The manipulation of his cult by the church of Llandaff in the twelfth century, however, renders the geographical associations of this character problematical. His depiction in *VIS* is at least itself evidence of a strong early association with Gwent.⁶⁵

Llantwit Major is in Welsh *Llanilltud Fawr* ('the great church of Illtud') and there are several indications that Llantwit Major was by an early date a major centre for the cult of St Illtud. The name itself is an obvious pointer.⁶⁶ A dedication to a saint is, of course, in principle not to be treated as simply an indicator of the early presence of the saint on that site. Victorian and Edwardian scholars of what I have termed the 'British School' of studies of saints' cults made this equation uncritically,⁶⁷ partly because of that assumption of abnormality, commented upon by Owen Chadwick (see above), which saw them treat sainthood in the Celtic world as different to sainthood elsewhere. Having set such assumptions aside, we remain unclear on what early medieval place-names incorporating an early saints' name actually indicate. Many *llan*- names appear to be first millennium in date;⁶⁸ *Llanilltud* is likely to at

⁵⁹ For example Petts, *The Early Medieval Church*, 175; Wood ('Britain', 77) says of Illtud that he 'according to tradition, was based at Llantwit Major'.

⁶⁰ Knight, 'From villa', 105.

⁶¹ See Knight, *South Wales*, 38–40.

⁶² See most recently Seaman, 'Julius and Aaron', 201–19.

⁶³ Holbrook and Thomas, 'An early-medieval monastic cemetery, 1–92.

⁶⁴ Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, esp. 91–4, 105–8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 80–5, 111–12; Davies, 'The saints', 375.

⁶⁶ Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, 142–5.

⁶⁷ Wooding, 'The figure', 8; see also Davies, 'The saints', 362–5.

⁶⁸ Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, 142–5; Roberts, 'Welsh ecclesiastical place-names', 43–4.

least indicate an early medieval mother-house of the monastic family of Illtud.⁶⁹ This assumption could be seen as supported by a number of inscribed stones of *ca* eighth-century and later date, now housed in the church. On two cross-shafts are references to men named 'Samson' and 'Illtut'. One monument ('Llantwit Major 3' in the recent *Corpus*) is the shaft of a cross, erected probably in the late eighth century. This, an 'Abbot Samson prepared for his soul' ('*quae preparauit Samsonis apatis pro anima sua*').⁷⁰ Another cross-shaft (Llantwit Major 4), probably dating from the ninth century, is inscribed as the '[cross] of Illtut, of King Samson' (+*Illtu[ti] Samson Regis*), with a further inscription: 'Samson has set up this cross for his soul' (*Samson posuit hanc c[r]ucem pro [a]nima eius*).⁷¹ These inscriptions, probably made within a century or so of the visit of the Samson-author to Wales, strongly indicate a cult of Illtud in or near to Llantwit in that time. That Samson was the name of an abbot and a king in the region is suggestive of the reverencing of St Samson, although not necessarily of a cult, which is consistent with the absence of such a cult in the region today.⁷²

The village churchyard preserves a very substantial range of buildings for a Welsh parish church and it is probably here that we should look first for the early monastic settlement. The earliest of the structures on the site dates only from around the twelfth century, when Llantwit Major passed into the ownership of the abbey of Tewkesbury in Warwickshire.⁷³ John Morris held that a Roman villa located on Morfa Farm, around a kilometre north of centre of the medieval village, was in fact the first monastery of Illtud.⁷⁴ This theory was based on V.E. Nash-Williams's discovery of christian burials in what he thought was a sub-Roman context in the villa, but A.H.A. Hogg, re-excavating the site in 1971, disputed Nash-Williams's sequence, uncoupling a context containing fourth-century coins from the context of the burials and suggesting that the latter were from well into the middle ages.⁷⁵ Morris's interpretation proceeded from a comparison with a model in which monasteries are believed to have arisen directly out of Gaulish villa communities.⁷⁶

Before the early 1900s claims for the location of Illtud's foundation indeed tended to reflect another model, which we have noted above, in which early monastic founders were associated with coastal sites, either as ascetics living on the margins or as missionaries who set up camp where they landed on the shore of their new territory.⁷⁷ Under this model, Illtud's monastery was identified with a later first-millennium source which explicitly located it in Dyfed. This was the Breton-Latin *Vita S. Pauli Aureliani* by Wrmonoc (AD 884). This placed Illtud on a 'certain island called *Pyrus* within the borders of the *patria* of the Demetae' ('*Demetarum patriae in finibus sita*').⁷⁸ The absence of a modern edition of *VIS* before the early

⁶⁹ Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, 142–3.

⁷⁰ Redknap & Lewis, *A Corpus*, 377–82; a 'Samson, Abbas altaris sancti Eltuti' appears in a charter appended to *Vita S. Cadoci*: ed. Wade-Evans, *Vitae*, ch.55.

⁷¹ Redknap & Lewis, *A Corpus*, 382–7.

⁷² See Jankulak below. I also concur with Burkitt's argument that it was in the monastery of Illtud that the Samson-author most likely heard the names of Samson's parents recited at Mass: Burkitt, 'St Samson', 49.

⁷³ Orrin, *Medieval Churches*, 239–58.

⁷⁴ Morris, 'The dates', 379–8; Bowen, *Saints*, 61.

⁷⁵ Hogg, 'The Llantwit Major villa', 235–7, 241–2; Nash-Williams, 'The Roman villa', 118–19.

⁷⁶ See critical discussion in Knight, 'From villa', 93–108; Percival, 'Villas', 1–21.

⁷⁷ Wooding, 'Island and coastal churches', esp. 203–5.

⁷⁸ Wrmonoc, *Vita S. Pauli Aureliani*, ch.2, ed. Plaine, 'Vita sancti Pauli', 213.

1900s prevented simple resolution of this matter. Wrmonoc, who did not visit Wales, apparently worked with information taken from *VIS* itself and so we should assume that he conflated Piro's monastery with Illtud's. Wrmonoc's conflated island monastery predominated in interpretations, partly in the absence of a compelling identification for Piro's *insula* (see below). At least one other location was mooted, again probably favouring *Vita S. Pauli Aureliani* over *VIS*. James Ussher had argued that a putative island on the western edge of Gwent,⁷⁹ named *Bachynys*, *Machynys*, or *Mynachynys*, was the base of Illtud and/or Piro.⁸⁰ This island is identified on early modern maps with a tidal-flat or island near Llanelli,⁸¹ but there is no early evidence to link it to our saints.

Recent excavations at two early British church-sites provide some further data of interest. At Whithorn (Wigtownshire), in what was in the early middle ages a British-speaking region of Scotland, excavations in 1984–91 established a sequence of continuous settlement from the late fifth century through to the high middle ages.⁸² Early attempts to find the site of St Ninian's earliest monastery were often on the prior assumption that it would be at a coastal site, according to the general model we have already noted, but the main cult-centre of Ninian is around 5 km inland.⁸³ While the 1984–91 excavation could not take settlement back to the very earliest date proposed for St Ninian, the sequence at Whithorn indicated that the cult-centre of the late first millennium is continuous from *at least* the early 500s and probably slightly earlier.⁸⁴ Closer to Llantwit Major, excavations at Llandough in 1963, 1979, and 1994 demonstrated the adjacency of a Roman villa, medieval parish church, and large post-Roman cemetery. Imported ceramics and radiocarbon dating suggested commencement of the church-site at least as early as the fifth/sixth century and continuation into the later first millennium.⁸⁵ These excavations add weight to the idea that churches which are cult-centres may be continuous of centres established in the Roman period – whether villas, cemeteries, or other types of spaces.

The attempt to find Illtud living on an island proceeded from older assumptions as to the coincidence of monasticism and the conversion of western Britain. The attempt to find Illtud living in a more Romanised landscape reflects more recent assumptions concerning the continuity of the Church out of Roman Britain. Morris's model still reflects a model sourced in an 'assumption of abnormality', in which the monasticism of early Britain was seen as a subset of a specifically Gaulish monasticism centred on Tours and Lérins; criticism of this model, along with the newer data from the villa, diminishes his case.⁸⁶ The claims of a site located in Glamorgan for Illtud's monastery, however, do appear to be the strongest. The

⁷⁹ Perhaps reading Wrmonoc's *in finibus sita* as allowing for a site near the boundary of Dyfed but within Gwent.

⁸⁰ 'Cum prope Lan-illtud ... diximus, nulla habeatur insula: videndum an non Maridunensium Lan-elthye sit potius hic intelligenda, cui Bacchannis insula adjacent, non procul ab occiduo limite Morganensium,' Ussher, *Britannicarum ecclesiarum antiquitates* (1639), in Elrington, *et al.* (edd.), *The Whole Works*, at 6.43.

⁸¹ See bbc.co.uk/weathermanwalking (2013), accessed 1 November 2014.

⁸² Full publication of the site in Hill, *Whithorn*, *passim*.

⁸³ Wooding, 'St Ninian', 15; Simpson, *St Ninian*, 71–7; Bowen, *Saints*, 164.

⁸⁴ For dating context of Whithorn, see Hill, *Whithorn*, 8; Wooding, 'St Ninian', 16. On the Mediterranean ceramics that give the date range *ca* 475–550 see Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, 14–25. These will also be discussed below in the context of Llandough and Caldey.

⁸⁵ Holbrook & Thomas, 'An early-medieval monastic cemetery, 1–92, esp. 18–25.

⁸⁶ Sharpe, 'Martyrs', 97–101.

earliest evidence from Llantwit Major reaches back to around a century after the time of the Samson-author's visit to Wales. The cases of Llandough and Whithorn suggest that it is reasonable to look for continuity from a sixth-century context into an extant medieval church settlement. All of this supports the current consensus that Llantwit Major is the site of Illtud's 'magnificent monastery'.

Samson's monasteries II: Piro's island

In *VIS* the call to a more austere life takes Samson from Illtud's monastery to an *insula* that was 'not far' ('non longe') from Illtud's monastery. Here an elderly man named Piro had recently founded a monastic community of eremitic tendency. Samson's departure was accomplished by Illtud's receipt of a vision in which a messenger of the Lord revealed that Samson should follow Piro's call. In Piro's monastery Samson lived (I.21) 'a wonderful, isolated and above all a heavenly life' ('admirabilem atque heremiticam immo et caelestem uitam'). He was able in this environment to pray unceasingly and eschew sleeping in a bed. The life in Piro's monastery is not, however, of a piece with that followed by Samson himself. Piro, while intoxicated, dies by falling down a well. Subsequent to this, Samson himself, elected abbot by the brethren, is sufficiently at odds with the community that he 'trained the brothers gently to the proper rule' (I.36), but, even having done this, we are told that Samson subsequently stood aloof from their lifestyle (I.36). *VIS* thus continues to represent Samson as different in his spirituality to the communities in which he lives (I.10, I.24) and as a notably reluctant abbot (I.36, I.42).

The Samson-author was, of course, aware that Samson was destined for a pastoral career, so these may be signs planted by the Samson-author to indicate that Samson's eremitism is only a stage on a longer, albeit restless, journey to pastoral leadership. Typically, these behaviours of Samson are not presented as matters of great drama or conflict; Samson is loved by his brothers and his differences are accepted.

Piro's monastery, as we have already noted, is generally – although only relatively recently (see below) – identified with Caldey Island in Pembrokeshire; the English name Caldey derives from a Norse formation. Its Welsh form, Ynys Bŷr, may include the element *pŷr*. It is a small island located around one kilometre off the coast of Pembrokeshire, some 100 km by sea from Llantwit Major. Today it is home to a Cistercian, previously Benedictine (Anglican, then Catholic), abbey, now co-dedicated to St Samson.⁸⁷ The island previously had a Tironian Priory, founded in the 1200s as a cell of St Dogmaels Abbey, near Cardigan, and closed at the Dissolution.⁸⁸ The buildings of this earlier priory still stand. There is no direct evidence that the priory was continuous of a previous foundation or that it promoted any cult of Samson. Two separate settlement sites, however, evince early medieval activity on the island. In the priory church is an inscribed pillar which was reportedly found close by. This carries inscriptions in ogham and Latin. The ogham is of much earlier date than the Latin and the two inscriptions are separate in content.⁸⁹ The ogham (most likely fifth century) reads *magla- dubr-* or *magla- dubar-* (with epenthetic 'a').⁹⁰ F.C. Burkitt's belief was that this commemorates a 'servant of Dubricius' and his reading was

⁸⁷ See Jankulak below.

⁸⁸ Cowley, *The Monastic Order*, 63–4; Ludlow, 'Pill Priory', 41–80.

⁸⁹ Edwards, *A Corpus*, 294–9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

instrumental in inspiring William Done Bushell to first identify Caldey as Piro's *insula*.⁹¹ The reading, however, is not conclusive as to either the religious status of the inscription or the name of its subject.⁹² The much later Latin inscription exhorts the reader to pray for the soul of one *Catuconus*. This exhibits a high standard of script and Latinity and dates from the eighth or early ninth century.⁹³ In neither case does the inscription indicate a specifically monastic connection, although the Latinity and script of the later inscription could suggest that a scriptorium was connected to the island not too long after the time when the Samson-author visited Wales. The other evidence of early medieval activity on the island is found around 300–500 m to the north of the priory, centring on the medieval parish church, now dedicated to St David.⁹⁴ Sherds of imported Mediterranean pottery (Phocaeen Red Slipware, from Asia Minor), and E ware (a ceramic from France) were recovered from the New Orchard area in the 1950s, although not recognised until the 1980s.⁹⁵ These are the same ceramic types as we have noted above at Whithorn and Llandough. The New Orchard is around 200m to the north of St David's church. The latter building has fabric of an early Romanesque type, suggesting construction in the early second millennium AD. The adjacent churchyard, unused between the Reformation and the early 1900s, has turned up numerous early burials, including cist-burials of probably first-millennium date.⁹⁶ A larger number and range of the same imported ceramics as are found in the New Orchard were also excavated in 1989–90 at an unenclosed high-status settlement at Longbury Bank, Penally, around two kilometres away on the adjacent mainland.⁹⁷ The Mediterranean ceramic finds are dateable to within a general range of ca 475–550.⁹⁸ The E ware is broadly dateable to the seventh century.⁹⁹ We should also note the evidence of the ninth-century poem *Emdyg Dinbych*, in the Book of Taliesin, that indicates the town of Tenby, three kilometres away, was also a high-status centre in the early middle ages.¹⁰⁰

The early medieval finds on Caldey thus indicate two centres of activity: the first in the vicinity of the medieval parish church, which in the middle ages was located close to the shore of a (now silted) creek, the second centred on the site of the medieval priory – which is adjacent to the island well, whether or not this is the one that features in Piro's demise.¹⁰¹ So, is Caldey the *insula* of Piro? This seems likely. Interpretations of the Welsh name for the island, Ynys Bŷr, once tended to follow Giraldus Cambrensis (*ob.* 1223) in deriving the second element *pŷr* from the same

⁹¹ Burkitt, '[The Caldey stone]', 6–7.

⁹² Sims-Williams, *The Celtic Inscriptions*, 131, and n.753 – also of interest from the point of view of monastic activity is whether the first element is Old Irish *mail* ('servant of'), which could be understood in a monastic sense, which was Burkitt's assumption.

⁹³ Charles-Edwards, *Wales*, 626–32; Edwards, *A Corpus*, 294–9.

⁹⁴ The date of St David's church is discussed in Bushell, 'An island', 242–7. It was re-commissioned in the 1830s after a long redundancy. Its medieval dedication appears to have been to St Mary.

⁹⁵ Campbell, 'New finds', 59–63.

⁹⁶ This is not a firm diagnostic as the evidence of Eglywswrw indicates that cist burials could be later than first-millennium date: Ludlow, 'St Cristiolus' churchyard', 20–48.

⁹⁷ Campbell & Lane, 'Excavations at Longbury Bank', 35–40. There had been earlier finds from Little Hoyle Cave – most likely having fallen from the settlement site, which is above the cave.

⁹⁸ Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, 14–25; for some more recent perspectives on this activity: Campbell & Bowles, 'Byzantine trade', 297–313; Hemer *et al.*, 'Evidence', 2352–9.

⁹⁹ Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, 27–52.

¹⁰⁰ Charles-Edwards, *Wales*, 659–69.

¹⁰¹ Also see my previous discussion of Caldey in Wooding, 'Island and coastal churches', 205–11.

element as forms the second half of the name Manorbier (*Maenor Bȳr*), 4km to the west of Caldey. Giraldus, who was born in Manorbier, saw the island as secondary to the mainland territory (*maenor*) of an eponymous landowner *Pirrus*.¹⁰² As late as the 1990s B.G. Charles still favoured the derivation as set out by Giraldus.¹⁰³

If we look at the much earlier sources first, the evidence of *VIS*, from around AD 700, associates a man named Piro with a monastic island. Wrmonoc (AD 884), probably interpreting *VIS*, locates an island named *Pyrus* in Dyfed, although he erroneously conflates Illtud's monastery with Piro's, for reasons that are unclear.¹⁰⁴ The Samson-author clearly distinguishes the two sites and we are reasonably confident that Illtud's monastery is in Glamorgan. That Wrmonoc locates an island named *Pyrus* in Dyfed may still be of interest, as *VIS* gives a regional location for neither Illtud's nor Piro's monasteries. These data, along with the evidence for earlier settlement on the island, and its medieval use as a religious site, all present a considerable, if circumstantial, case for Caldey as the *insula* of Piro.

Robert Fawtier, the first modern editor of *VIS*, questioned whether an island in Pembrokeshire could be described as '*non longe*' from Llantwit Major. The Samson-author, although he had been to both the sites, was writing from the perspective of Brittany, from which perspective two sites at least on the same coast in Wales might be 'not far' apart. The distance is admittedly sufficient to give pause.¹⁰⁵ Both Fawtier and, more recently, Fred Cowley have also noted the detail of the text that horsemen were apparently able to ride up to the monastery.¹⁰⁶ That such details as crossing water are passed over in medieval narratives is not, however, without parallel.¹⁰⁷ A further objection raised by Cowley and Flobert concerns the possible ambiguity of *insula* as a term for an island. Flobert suggests that it is a term also used for a small monastery (*petit couvant*).¹⁰⁸ Cowley asserts that it is 'frequently used as a synonym for "monastery"'.¹⁰⁹ *Insula* is certainly a word with a semantic range that reaches beyond simple geographical islands; in classical usage it can also mean a tenement.¹¹⁰ The claim that *insula* is a synonym for 'monastery' appears more elusive. I can find some possible, if scarcely conclusive, Insular examples,¹¹¹ but there appear to be few from elsewhere – Cowley, although a historian of monasticism,

¹⁰² Giraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, I.12, edd. Brewer *et al.*, VI.92.

¹⁰³ 'There may be some unproven connection with the monk named *Piro* in the *Life* of St Samson of Dol': Charles, *The Place-Names*, 567.

¹⁰⁴ It might be on the assumption that the whole setting of *VIS* was in Dyfed, or perhaps reflects a detail present in Wrmonoc's copy of *VIS* that has been lost from the extant tradition.

¹⁰⁵ See Wooding, *Communication*, 16–21.

¹⁰⁶ Cowley *apud* Howells, *Caldey*, 18–19; Fawtier, *La Vie*, 41–4.

¹⁰⁷ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ Flobert, *La Vie*, 179, n.20.3.

¹⁰⁹ Cowley, *apud* Howells, *Caldey*, 18.

¹¹⁰ See discussion in detail in Wooding, 'Island and coastal churches', 208–9. Usages recorded in medieval Latin word lists are the classical ones of a 'slave-mill', 'tenement', and 'temple' – with an additional sense of '[church] aisle', Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*, s.v. *insula*; Lewis & Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *insula*.

¹¹¹ An *insula nomine Ary* to which Caradoc Fynach retreated ca 1100s is now generally identified with 'Barry Island' in Pembrokeshire, a mainland space: see John of Tynemouth, *De Sancto Caradoco hermita* in *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. Horstman, 175; Charles, *The Place-Names*, 235–6. In Tírechán's *Collectanea* Bishop Assicus retreats into an *insola* which is at least ambiguous in its reference to an island – it can be read as referring to the island of Rathlin O'Beirne, or to a mountain retreat in Slieve League: Tírechán, *Collectanea*, ch.22, ed. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, 140. On the case for it as an island see Wooding, 'The location', 102–5.

gives no examples. If we look back to early discussions of Caldey and *VIS*, such as that of Hugh Williams in 1894, one is inspired to think that discussions of only the specific case of Caldey have inspired a generalised, in effect circular, assertion that *insula* means monastery.¹¹² We will see a similar potential circularity in treatment of evidence from *VIS* when we come to consider the ‘peninsular road’ model which influences readings of Samson’s crossing of Cornwall.

Also of interest in these episodes is the role of Dubricius, who, as we have already noted, is a figure associated in tradition with Gwent. He is strongly attached to Piro’s community, his custom being to spend the whole of Lent on retreat in his own house nearby (I.33).¹¹³ Dubricius had earlier, at Illtud’s monastery, ordained Samson to the diaconate (I.13), then to the priesthood (I.15). Now he assembles the chapter that elects Samson abbot of the abbey of Piro. Cowley sees this as further working against the identification of Caldey as Piro’s *insula*, as it would be the territory of another bishop.¹¹⁴ Here Cowley appears to reify the assumption that early Welsh episcopal territories were coterminous with kingdoms.¹¹⁵ Also, whether monasteries or islands were naturally within the purview of a territorial bishop might at least be open to question.¹¹⁶

If we allow that Llantwit Major and Caldey are thus correctly equated with the monasteries in *VIS*, we could see a particular spatial symbolism to Samson’s progression in the monastic life. His first journey takes him away from his homeland (Dyfed), but later he returns, in a symbolically important step, to live in a liminal place with respect to it – in it but separated from it by the sea. Such an act would be clearly understood as an act of symbolic abstinence. Settling in this way, within sight of his homeland, but not fully within it, predicates a pivotal scene in *VIS*. Soon after his relocation to the *insula* Samson receives a message that his earthly father is ill, but he disdains this, saying that he himself (I.24) has ‘left behind Egypt’ (‘Aegyptum reliqui’). Piro tells him that in God’s sight it is important that ‘spiritual things are sown by you where carnal things have thrived’ (‘ubi carnalia creuerunt spiritalia per te seminentur’) – that is, to still see the secular world as falling within the concerns of an ascetic. Samson reluctantly turns toward the secular world, where indeed he ultimately will find his final vocation. ‘Egypt’, as we have already noted above, here does not invoke the Egypt of the early monastic fathers, but the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt – a typology or ‘spirituality of Exodus’ that was a common symbolism of

¹¹² Williams also speculated on the use of *ynys* for inland sites. In the case of Caldey he suggested that *insula* for an inland monastery could be a legacy ‘possibly from the fact that the earlier ones were founded on islands’, Williams, ‘Some aspects’, 113. This reifies a local, ‘western seaways’, model of monastic foundation from the sea (see above). *Geriadur Prifysgol Cymru s.v. ynys*: ‘kingdom, realm, land, province, region, area, and also river-meadow, holm’. It is used to refer to inland spaces, but not as synonym for ‘monastery’.

¹¹³ One piece of information is of interest here, though of uncertain value; one of the Llandaff charters records grants of land in Penally, on the mainland adjacent to Caldey, to Dubricius, ed. Evans & Rhys, *The Text*, 77–8.

¹¹⁴ Cowley (*apud* Howells, *Caldey*, 19). It is interesting to note here a long-standing myth that Caldey was once part of the diocese of Llandaff, which may derive from such assumptions.

¹¹⁵ Charles-Edwards, *Wales*, 611–12.

¹¹⁶ As Wendy Davies (*An Early Welsh Microcosm*, 146–9) previously noted, it is also of interest for assumptions arising from the ‘Celtic Church’ paradigm here that Dubricius is apparently a bishop who is a secular cleric, not a monk – and Illtud, though in a large monastery, is an abbot who is not a bishop. Samson (I.42–5) later does appear to be simultaneously pushed into the roles of abbot and bishop. Burkitt, nonetheless, sees Illtud and Dubricius as exceptional and operating in a Church under straightened circumstances, yet it is more likely that there was less conflation of the roles than later traditions suggest.

early monastic theology.¹¹⁷ The monk who ‘leaves behind Egypt’ is symbolically separated from the land of secular life by having crossed the water to live in the desert. Here he contemplates the Promised Land. An interesting comparison could be found in *Nauigatio S. Brendani abbatis*, a work of the mid-ninth century. Brendan, earlier in his life, had left his native territory of Munster to found monasteries in Connacht. Later in life, having accepted a vocation to make a journey of *peregrinatio* on the sea, he first travels to the furthest extent of his native territory, and makes a retreat on the edge of his native kingdom of Altraige while he explicitly refuses to visit his parents, who, the text observes, are still living nearby.¹¹⁸ If the *insula* is Caldey, this works out to be a very similar juxtaposition.

Samson’s monasteries III: the delightful castle and cave

We have fewer clues for the third site of Samson’s religious life in Wales. Samson, after his return from Ireland, decamps (I.40) to a new location at ‘a very delightful castle near the River Severn’ (‘iuxta Habrinum flumen castellum admodum delicatum’). From there he wanders in a forest until he finds an eastward-facing cave (I.41).¹¹⁹ As the Samson-author claims to have visited this site, we should probably assume that these are precise details, but they present no obvious candidates. I see no reason to assume that the Samson-author made the distinction between the Bristol Channel and the Severn that we make today – location on the Bristol Channel shore should be considered possible. ‘Castle’ here we should presume to mean a prehistoric earthwork. Jankulak, along with Sharpe, observes that the episode itself is also of especial interest for the location there, in the time of the Samson-author’s visit, of commemorations of Samson, although it apparently did not develop into a known cult-site.¹²⁰ As this site could be almost anywhere on the shore between Pembrokeshire and Shropshire, there is not much profit in speculation. The few attempts to identify the site proceed from prior assumptions and uncertain equations between ‘Sampson’ place-names and the activities of the saint.¹²¹

In terms of the monastic narrative of initiation here, we could see a further symbolic progression. Samson’s journey takes him to live in a cave near a fort. St Anthony, the first monk, built his monastery in an abandoned fort. St Paul of Thebes, the first hermit, had his hermitage in a cave – indeed one, like Samson’s, adjacent to a spring.¹²² This, the end of Samson’s journey of formation from community to hermitage, is also symbolically a journey back to monastic life at its very beginnings and to the respective precursors of the two monastic traditions which contest Samson’s vocation.¹²³

¹¹⁷ McGinn, ‘Ocean’, 157.

¹¹⁸ *Nauigatio* 4, ed. Orlandi & Gugliametti, 12–13.

¹¹⁹ This episode is discussed in Ahronson & Charles-Edwards, ‘Prehistoric Annals’, 457–8.

¹²⁰ Jankulak, ‘Present and yet absent’, below; also see Sharpe, ‘Martyrs’, 149. Compare also the case of Llantwit Major above.

¹²¹ Bushell, ‘The early Life, 319–38, at 333; Jankulak below.

¹²² Evagrius, *Vita Antonii*, ch. 12; Jerome, *Vita S. Pauli primi eremita*, ch. 5.

¹²³ I would regard the *castellum*, which is used as a residence (*habitaclum*), in this way as a primitive monastery, but one which does not persist to be remembered as a *monasterium* (in any event an ambiguous term in early-medieval Britain, on which see Brett, Review of Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 123). Hence I do not see that it precludes Olson’s argument (*Early Monasteries*, 10–11) that the Cornish monastery is the only monastery that Samson founded in Britain. Samson is, by the time of the Cornish foundation, a bishop and is so able to ordain a family member to lead the community, which he could not in the earlier case.

Leaving Wales: the entry into peregrinatio

In chapters I.42–45 of *VIS* Samson is summoned from the hermit life to be, first of all, installed as abbot of an unnamed monastery of some antiquity and, second, consecrated a bishop.¹²⁴ His consecration occurs on the feast of St Peter's Chair (22 February), but by Easter he has received a vision that his destiny is to become a *peregrinus* and leave Britain, which he does without delay. The packed sequence of events here is difficult to disentangle, although Sowerby plausibly sees them as governed by the contemporary historical need of the church of Dol.¹²⁵

In the narrative of *VIS* Samson has by now progressively exhausted the life of a monk in community, of monk in eremitic community, and as a hermit. He has learned that he is not a willing abbot. The journey into life as a *peregrinus* is both a journey into a new stage of separation within monastic spirituality and journey through a space between worlds whence he can emerge as a prophet in a new country.¹²⁶

We turn, then, to the route of Samson's *peregrinatio*. Samson takes ship and makes his landfall in the estuary of the Camel, whence he proceeds to a monastery named *Docco*. This is confidently identified with the extant church-site of St Kew.¹²⁷ To reach St Kew from the Camel estuary involves a journey of around 6 km, leaving the Camel near the modern town of Wadebridge. If, as appears likely, the modern A39 preserves a route-way of the Roman period or earlier, this could have taken a traveller from the Camel to within 1.5 km of St Kew. At *Docco* Samson is advised (I.46) by the wisest of the community, Viniavus, 'that we fall short of our former practice' ('quod iam in nostribus prioribus institutis laxamur'), and Samson is urged to continue his *peregrinatio*, lest they rebuke him or he denounce them. This is an elaborate tableau, with Viniavus coming to meet Samson; the monk who at least sees his monastery as 'fallen away' (*laxere*) coming to dissuade Samson from engagement from his more obdurate colleagues – perhaps because Samson is notably a stickler on issues of practice, or perhaps because Samson has moved on from such questions and should not return to them. Viniavus advises that it is undesirable that either should judge the other – echoing the advice of Gildas (*Fragmenta* 4, 7) – and further advises Samson that his future lies across the sea.¹²⁸ After visiting *Docco*, or at least its vicinity, we are told that Samson determined to 'to completely traverse the country' and seek the 'Southern Sea' (I.47).

The next episode (I.48–50) is concerned with an incident in the *pagus* of *Tricurius* (clearly the medieval hundred of Trigg), where he breaks up a bacchanal led by the chieftain Guedianus.¹²⁹ From here Samson proceeds to the southern shore, where,

¹²⁴ This monastery is attributed to foundation by 'St German' and often equated with that of Illtud earlier in the *VIS*. Though Germanus is supposed to have ordained Illtud, I see no reason to assume that this makes probable that the unnamed monastery is Illtud's. For one attempt to locate this monastery in western England, see Gilbert, 'Deerhurst', 129–49.

¹²⁵ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 27 – also with critique of views of Poulin.

¹²⁶ Richter, *Ireland*, 44–5.

¹²⁷ Doble, *Saint Docco*; Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 81–2; Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult*, 129–30; N. Orme, *The Saints of Cornwall*, 28–9; Orme, *English Church Dedications*, 90–1; Padel, 'Two new pre-Conquest charters', 20–7; Fizzard, *Plympton Priory*, 21; Hooke, *Pre-Conquest Charter-Bounds*, 33–7.

¹²⁸ Though it falls beyond the scope of this study, it is tempting here to see a meta-narrative in this and other episodes of *VIS* of a tension between monasticism and evolution of *monasteria* in Celtic Britain with a more pastoral role. Sowerby ('The Lives', 27) sees the episode in narrative terms: Samson's new, episcopally affirmed, holiness.

¹²⁹ Charles-Edwards, *Wales*, 23–4 (on Trigg).

after defeating a serpent that terrorised a community, he establishes a monastery before departing for Brittany (I.50–2). The case for this being located at Golant is the most compatible in topographic terms, although Southill has also been suggested and does evince earlier evidence of settlement.¹³⁰

A striking aspect of the Cornish episodes is their consistent depiction of Cornwall as a contested space in spiritual terms. Samson successively encounters a (somewhat) ‘fallen’ monastery (with its implications of some antiquity), a bacchanal, and a serpent that holds a land in its thrall. Some of these encounters echo previous episodes: Samson has previously contested with serpents (I.12, I.32), and no monastic community seems to entirely live up to his expectations. The bacchanal is a new and rather exotic motif. We could see the Cornish episodes as fitting a symbolic narrative. Cornwall is separated by water from Wales, but also from the land that is his destination. It becomes, in the ‘spirituality of Exodus’, for Samson a peninsular ‘desert’ (Sinai) that lies between his place of origin (Egypt) and Brittany (the Promised Land). We have already noted the use of such an Exodus-inspired taxonomy of space by the Samson-author in his reference to Egypt. The suggestion that there was reversion to idolatry in Cornwall in the mid-sixth century might be chiefly a symbol of exceptional wildness in this desert space.¹³¹

An especially interesting aspect of *VIS* is the detail it provides of the process of Samson’s retreat into a state of *peregrinatio pro Christo* (self-exile for Christ) across the sea. Samson is possibly the earliest Insular saint whom we could explicitly identify in the role of *peregrinus* to the Continent – although his *Vita* is later than that of St Columbanus, who is often given this status, although he travelled around three decades or more after Samson.¹³² *Peregrinatio*, in the Insular context, has mainly been studied in terms of Irish and English manifestations.¹³³ Less attention has been paid to British exiles who may be *peregrini* on a similar model to the Irish,¹³⁴ perhaps because these were long conflated with a supposed ‘secondary mission’ between Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany (see above and also below). Inasmuch as recent studies plausibly make Irish monasticism in the sixth century a subset of its British counterpart, it may be that British and Irish *peregrinatio* followed the same theology, if not the same outcomes, in both nations. It is harder to track *peregrini* to Brittany from Wales than from Ireland; a Welshman’s *peregrinatio* in Brittany – like an Irishman’s in Gaelic Scotland – would not have stood out so prominently, being within the same language and cultural group. That Columbanus first settled in Brittany in his own *peregrinatio* could even be evidence that he was informed by British networks in journeying to the Continent.¹³⁵

The ‘assumption of abnormality’ may again be at issue here. *Peregrinatio* in this context is only the Insular expression of a widespread late-Roman trend, in which

¹³⁰ Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 12–14; Henderson *apud* Doble, *Saint Samson*, 27–8; Okasha, *Corpus*, 264–7.

¹³¹ Sowerby, ‘The Lives’, 28. Ian Wood has noted the Samson-author’s propensity for puns and the finding of pagans in a *pagus* might be an example of this?

¹³² I follow the consensus that attributes Columbanus with the status of first-known Irish *peregrinus* to the Continent – following Kenney (*The Sources*, 497–8) in dismissing the claims of St Fridolinus.

¹³³ Charles-Edwards, ‘The social background’, 43–59. Alexander O’Hara, in an excellent recent study, explores comparisons of Ireland with the Continental experience, but not with reference to the British: ‘*Patria, peregrinatio and paenitentia*’, 89–124.

¹³⁴ For rare discussion see Dumville, ‘Some British aspects’, 21, and n.23.

¹³⁵ Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, XIX.37; Dumville, ‘Some British aspects’, 20–1.

moving away from one's native kin and community is seen in terms of a journey closer to Christ, away from the things that bind one to secular life; in the late-antique context this was not exclusively, or even generally, a course followed only by monks, although this became a popular idea within Insular monasticism.¹³⁶ Samson's exile has resonances with Irish expressions of *peregrinatio*. He progresses to a state of self-exile from his home territory (see above and *VIS*, I.10). In this he makes what Jonas in his *Vita S. Columbani* (ca 640) represents as a simple *peregrinatio*. In leaving Britain Samson then proceeds to make what Jonas presents as the journey to a 'place of higher *peregrinatio*' ('potioris peregrinationis locus'), over the sea.¹³⁷ *VIS* makes clear that this process is one of progressively weakening bonds with blood relatives to embrace affinity only with one's religious brethren. When members of Samson's own family follow him into the monastic life, his uncle, Umbraphel, tells Samson (*VIS*, I.40) that they will not do so as part of his earthly family, being 'obliged to follow you, not carnally, but spiritually' ('non te carnaliter, sed spiritaler sequi debemus'). Samson's reply is 'You indeed, Brother Umbraphel, ought to be a *peregrinus*' ('Tu quidem, frater Vmbraphel, peregrinus debes esse'). *Peregrinatio* is thus presented as an ultimate stage in this progression. In his own *peregrinatio* Samson can also be seen to have fulfilled the dictum of the 'Second Synod of St Patrick' (ch.15) that:

One's country is first to be taught after the example of Christ, and afterwards, if one does not make progress, it is to be abandoned, according to the example of the apostle.¹³⁸

Samson, as we have seen, expresses his first exile as a journey away from 'Egypt', a taxonomy of exile that permeates many discussions of *peregrinatio*. Like other Insular exiles, his progression across the sea takes him into a pastoral role that he has generally eschewed in his homeland.

A question that should briefly detain us is whether this is really the spirituality of the 500s or more that of the late seventh century, the time in which the Samson-author wrote, and in which *peregrinatio* may have settled on a form that it has not yet achieved in ca 550 – that is, is it a literary anachronism on the part of the Samson-author?¹³⁹ We should again beware the assumption of abnormality – that Insular *peregrinatio* is in some way *sui generis*. *Peregrinatio* was a longer movement and not just a unique development of Insular practice; so it is possible that Samson was simply a *peregrinus* in a longer model – allowing the potential for some evolution in the concept.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, for example 108–53; Claussen, 'Peregrinatio', 33–76; Brito-Martins, 'The concept', 83–94.

¹³⁷ Charles-Edwards, 'The social background', 43.

¹³⁸ Ed. & transl. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 190–1.

¹³⁹ Wood, 'Britain', 78; Sharpe, 'Martyrs', 85.

¹⁴⁰ He was also a more or less direct contemporary of St Columba, who made a similar retreat to Scotland. Both men are explicitly *peregrini*: *VIS*, I.46 [Viniavus to Samson] "laudante Deo in Euangelio peregrinationem propter illum subire"; Adomnán, *Vita S. Columbae*, for example Second Preface (4a) 'de Scotia ad Britanniam pro Christo peregrinari volens enavigavit', edd. Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life*, 186.

God's wonderful trackway

One further aspect of the text remains at issue in reflecting on the interpretation of *peregrinatio* as a theme and, as it is a considerable case study of the reception of *VIS*, warrants a detailed assessment here. Scholars of *VIS* as a text may be surprised to be told of the extent of its reception and influence in archaeological studies. At a glance this use of *VIS* might seem to be a matter mainly of antiquarian interest – a reception characteristic of a past period in which archaeologists were concerned with travel as the main vehicle for cultural innovation – what is often known as ‘migrationism’ or ‘diffusionism’ – and in which they were prepared to interpret archaeology in terms of rather sweeping comparisons with evidence from texts. The ‘western seaways’ model which these comparisons fuelled, as well as its hagiographical offshoot the ‘saints and seaways’ model of Bowen, however, has continued to exert an influence on studies of saints. A study of the reception of *VIS* by archaeologists here provides a paradigm for contextualising his sometimes bewildering models of approach to saints and *peregrinatio*.

In 1911, O.G.S. Crawford read a paper to the Oxford University Anthropological Society on mapping distributions of Bronze-Age artefacts.¹⁴¹ Crawford’s presentation captured the imagination of the nascent discipline of archaeology and he was soon followed in his approach by other archaeologists, such as E.T. Leeds, Cyril Fox, Gordon Childe, and Hugh Hencken, who wished to expand archaeological thought beyond study of individual sites into holistic models. These studies are seen as marking the genesis of modern ‘landscape’ archaeology. In a second iteration of the same research, however, Crawford also (in his own words) engaged in some ‘wild theorizing about dedications to St Catherine which I had taken over from Peake’.¹⁴² This refers to Harold John Peake, an influential archaeologist and anthropologist, who, along with the anthropologist and zoologist Herbert Fleure, promoted the idea that a ‘megalithic’ culture in the Atlantic was created by voyages of eastern Mediterranean metalworkers to the west, partly in search of raw materials.¹⁴³ This theory of maritime diffusion was projected onto maps of prehistoric artefacts. Subsequent comparison of these, mostly Bronze-Age and earlier, patterns with saints’ dedications – artefacts of a much later date – was mostly offered simply on a heuristic basis, although Peake notably was inclined to see actual continuity between prehistoric and historic religious centres.¹⁴⁴ Crawford was not long moved by this latter idea,¹⁴⁵ but sweeping models of continuity seem to have inspired Bowen, who was a colleague and a disciple of Peake’s collaborator Fleure.¹⁴⁶ In 1932 Bowen made a study of the geography of early christianity in Britain, in which four out of ten pages comprised an analysis of geology and prehistoric artefacts, the relevance of

¹⁴¹ Crawford, *Said and Done*, 69; Crawford, ‘The distribution’, 184–97, 304–18.

¹⁴² Crawford, ‘Prehistoric trade’, 641–9; Crawford, *Said and Done*, 70.

¹⁴³ See especially the ‘Corridors of Time series, in 10 vols (1927–56), of which most relevant are: Fleure and Peake, *The Way*; Fleure & Peake, *Merchant Venturers*; also Peake, *The Bronze Age*.

¹⁴⁴ Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain*, 10–11; for a further example of this type of theorising, see Peake, ‘The evolution’, 208–26.

¹⁴⁵ Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain*, 9–16, 22–3; Crawford, *Said and Done*, 39–41.

¹⁴⁶ Bowen, ‘Early christianity’, 267–77, 274; Bowen, ‘The travels of St Samson’, 61–7; Bowen, *Saints*, 169. For critique of the ‘western seaways’, see Wooding, *Communication*. In that work I made only limited critique of the study of saints, which I will consider at length in a further monograph (*Saints and the Sea in the Celtic Lands*, Cardiff, in preparation). For critique of the model in terms of saints see Jankulak, ‘Adjacent saints’ dedications’, 91–118.

which to the early Church is left to the reader to infer.¹⁴⁷ In 1934 Bowen followed this with a close study of *VIS*, which still opens with a broad sweep through prehistoric food vessels and megaliths and, rather ambitiously for the archaeology of the 1930s, proposes ‘to re-examine the cultural material of proto-historic times in the light of our greatly extended knowledge of the pre-historic period’.¹⁴⁸ Taylor was his main authority for *VIS*; Bowen was apparently as yet unaware of the studies of G.H. Doble, although these would soon become central to his collection of data for the mapping of saints’ dedications.

Bowen’s studies were largely of the dedications of saints as distributions, from which routes of ‘missionary journeys’ could be mapped by ‘*a priori* reasoning’ – a direct equation of saints’ activities with dedications to them that arose from the earlier studies of Rice Rees and the ‘British School’.¹⁴⁹ Bowen continued to be preoccupied with prehistoric comparisons, although he oscillated between a concern with patterns of the late Iron Age that might be seen as historically adjacent to early Christianity¹⁵⁰ and more chronologically remote comparisons such as with the Mesolithic and Bronze Ages.¹⁵¹ In the 1940s Bowen and Doble both published articles in Crawford’s pioneering journal *Antiquity* and Crawford himself came to develop some of their ideas.¹⁵²

All of this may seem to concern only archaeological theories that are of a past era: an out-dated diffusionist model and some rather wild comparisons of saints with imagined Bronze-Age ‘carpet-baggers’. Bowen’s models, however, remain influential on studies of Celtic saints and the ‘western seaways’ have also gained a new life in the 2000s with a revisionist model for the dissemination of the Celtic languages (‘Celtic from the West’) which turns on models of Bronze-Age traffic along the ‘seaways’.¹⁵³ Of particular interest to interpreters of *VIS* was Crawford’s theory of ‘isthmus roads’ or ‘peninsular roads’, which appears to have gained force from comparisons with *VIS*. Strangely, *VIS* in the 1930s probably had more influence on prehistoric archaeology in Britain than it did on historical studies. Commerce and the saints came to be perceived as part of a continuum shaped by nature rather than continuity.

In 1913 Crawford advocated a route-way from Mount’s Bay, on the south coast, to Mawgan, on the north. A few years later Hugh Hencken advocated a similar route-way linking the Camel and the Fowey estuaries.¹⁵⁴ These putative route-ways were interpretations derived from mapping of distributions of selected artefacts – or, one might less charitably say, by mapping ‘dots’ and joining them up. Objects on opposite shores of peninsulas were envisaged as marking the end-points of route-ways designed as portages *across* the peninsulas, not simply access routes from the

¹⁴⁷ Bowen, ‘Early christianity’, 267–77.

¹⁴⁸ Bowen, ‘The travels of St Samson’, 61–7.

¹⁴⁹ Bowen, ‘The settlements’, 178, 180; Wooding, ‘The figure’, 7–10; Davies, ‘The saints’, 362–5. For positive assessments of Bowen’s methodology see: Ó Riain, ‘The saints’, 378–80; Thomas, ‘Landscape with figures’, 15–31.

¹⁵⁰ Bowen, ‘The settlements’, 175.

¹⁵¹ Bowen, ‘The travels of the Celtic saints’, 18, 19, 20, 26.

¹⁵² Doble’s 1935 study (*Saint Samson in Cornwall*) appeared within a year of Bowen’s. Apparently at this time each was unaware of the other’s researches. For Bowen in *Antiquity* see above. For Doble in *Antiquity*: Doble, ‘The relics’ and ‘Saint Congar’.

¹⁵³ Cunliffe & Koch (ed.), *Celtic from the West*; sharp critique of the model in Isaac, ‘The nature’. For other reiterations of the model for prehistory: Garrow and Sturt, ‘Grey waters’, 59–72.

¹⁵⁴ Hencken, *The Archaeology*, 181–2.

shore into the interiors. The underlying assumption here was one of a limited marine technology in the context of the challenging sailing conditions that are found off the ends of peninsulas.¹⁵⁵ In the 'peninsular-road' model that they envisaged, the greater safety of the overland route was presumed to offset the additional labour involved in portaging the contents of ships overland. Notwithstanding that the conditions off Land's End are indeed challenging, it is hard to see that this model would have made sense in economic terms, especially when we consider the relatively short distance by sea between the mouths of the Camel and Fowey.

Mount's Bay, the starting-point of one of Crawford's putative peninsular roads, was one of the sites posited for the location of *Ictis*, a tidal island known from classical sources that was an exchange-point or 'gateway community' for trading of raw materials with Mediterranean merchants or their agents arriving by sea.¹⁵⁶ *Ictis* was thus a hub of local redistributive exchange of materials that were most likely brought out of the adjacent mainland. The inference that such coastal sites were at the end of routes that crossed the watershed from the Bristol Channel, rather than, for example, reaching down to either shore from inland centres, is a less plausible imposition on the data. We should also be aware here that Crawford cited as an inspiration examples such as the isthmus of Corinth. In that case, however, the isthmus is a relatively low-lying crossing of around 5 km, adjacent to major population centres, that obviates a voyage by sea of nearly 500 km.¹⁵⁷ In Britain, the Crinan isthmus is a comparable case – and it is significant that both these isthmuses today are cut by canals. The Fowey–Camel 'isthmus' is around 20 km between the heads of navigation on the two rivers and rises to a height of around 200 m near Helman Tor.

By Crawford's account he had himself envisaged the idea of peninsular roads 'before I knew anything about St. Sampson and the other saints of the Dark Ages'.¹⁵⁸ Hugh Hencken, however, was aware of *VIS* in his discussion of the peninsular-road model in his monograph of 1932.¹⁵⁹ From the 1920s through to the 1940s the reified assumption that Samson followed an 'isthmus road' or route-way from the Camel to the Fowey both permeated thinking about prehistoric trade and shaped readings of *VIS* itself. The 'trans-peninsular' model was given further force by Doble and Bowen in studies of dedications of saints whose cults span Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany.¹⁶⁰ In 1945 Bowen could describe Illtud as an exception to the 'usual Cornish linkage' of the careers of the Welsh saints in Brittany, simply because he has no dedications in Cornwall.¹⁶¹ Of a group of Irish saints who have dedications around Penzance, he noted: 'if these saints used the trans-peninsular route, they used that of the Hayle river to St. Michael's Mount'.¹⁶² In 1969 he referred to *VIS*'s 'vivid description of him using the famous trans-peninsular route from Padstow to Fowey'.¹⁶³ Stuart Walker made similar speculations that two 'St Columb' dedications in Cornwall marked Columbanus's journey to Brittany.¹⁶⁴ As late as the 2000s Jeremy Knight

¹⁵⁵ On which see van der Noort, 'An ancient seascape'; Chapman & Geary 'The social context'.

¹⁵⁶ Hawkes, 'Ictis', 211–33.

¹⁵⁷ Wooding, *Communication*, 107; Crawford, 'Western seaways', 185.

¹⁵⁸ Crawford, 'Western seaways', 185.

¹⁵⁹ Hencken, *The Archaeology*, 181–2; Fox, *The Personality*, 69–70 – Fox is equivocal on whether it is transshipment or simply resources brought to the shore from inland.

¹⁶⁰ Bowen, *Saints*, 169.

¹⁶¹ Bowen, 'The settlements', 180.

¹⁶² Bowen, 'The travels of the Celtic saints', 24.

¹⁶³ Bowen, *Saints*, 168.

¹⁶⁴ Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, xix.

could suggest that the Samson-author followed the ‘cross-peninsular’ route via the Camel to Fowey.¹⁶⁵ In Samson’s case it is evident that he did, but there is no direct evidence that anyone else did.

The ‘peninsular road’ theory has also had an impact in popular spirituality and tourism. In 1982 a path between the two estuaries was established, linking together some existing trails, and designated as the ‘Saints’ Way’.¹⁶⁶ The promotional material of this walking route refers to ‘prehistoric traders’ and, mostly unspecified, saints.¹⁶⁷ The present writer walked this ‘way’ in 2014 and found few specific references to Samson in literature or signage on the route. The journey of a specific saint, arguably the one lying behind the whole concept, appears to have been subsumed into a generic model. It is worth observing that *VIS* indicates that Samson set out to follow a path across Cornwall only after Viniavus, at *Docco*, advised him to seek the Southern Sea, upon which he then sent away his ship. The argument that Samson was following a well-beaten path, or even one predetermined by him, has been imposed on the text: it is itself a circular argument and further circularity permeates academic and popular references to his path. This was partly acknowledged by Bowen in his 1969 monograph:

Here we seem to have a genuine example of the actual use of the transpeninsular routes, and of that ‘continuity of tradition’ which characterised the cultural life of Outer Britain throughout prehistoric and later times.¹⁶⁸

He never seems to have really acknowledged the possibility that Samson might be the only genuine example.

This case study of *VIS* is of especial interest because it makes clear, as many other examples do not, the extent to which Bowen’s theory of the ‘western seaways’, popularised in monographs of the 1950s and 1960s, reifies interpretive models that had become, by that time, more or less defunct in archaeological studies. Bowen’s case study of Samson appeared right at the beginning (1934) of his studies of British saints, arguably shaping his thesis concerning saints and the ‘western seaways’. The fact that it did is firmly linked to a longer tendency to draw travels of saints into a model of the ‘western seaways’ in which they could be compared to inferred travels of prehistoric traders.

Conclusion

Sowerby has observed that *VIS* is rather less episodic than some early *Vitae*. Such judgements can be a matter of opinion, but in *VIS* there is certainly a monastic narrative with a distinct progression. Sowerby’s further argument that the foundation of the Cornish monastery was conceived as a climactic scene – whether in an anterior

¹⁶⁵ Knight, *South Wales*, 39.

¹⁶⁶ For a reflection on the genre of saints’ trails and their actual links to saints, see Cusack, ‘History, authenticity, and tourism’, esp. 12–13.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Visit Cornwall (www.visitcornwall.com/things-to-do/south-cornwall/north-cornwall/saints-way-trail-padstow-to-fowey) and Wikipedia, which refers to the trans-peninsular route (wikipedia.org/wiki/Saints%27_Way) in terms of unspecified ‘saints’ from Ireland. ‘The Saint’s Way’ (www.cornwalls.co.uk/walking/the_saints_way.htm) refers to ‘traders needing to avoid the treacherous waters around Lands End’ (sites consulted on 2 April 2016).

¹⁶⁸ Bowen, *Saints*, 168.

conception of a **Vita* or within *VIS* itself – also fits with a reading of *VIS* as a narrative with an overwhelmingly monastic preoccupation up to the point of Samson's departure from Britain.¹⁶⁹ The British element of *VIS* was clearly written by someone who was immersed in monasticism and wished to illustrate the principle of monastic love or charity (*caritas*) in the formation of a holy man. Of particular interest in *VIS* are scenes in which Samson and figures who act as his advisors resolve their points of difference. Samson and Illtud pursue very different paths in education under the one roof. Samson establishes his own place in the arguably somewhat uncongenial setting of Piro's monastery. Illtud, Piro, and Viniavus practise a monasticism potentially in conflict with Samson's. Samson judges Illtud's, he stands apart to an extent from Piro's, and Viniavus judges his own monasticism on what he apparently sees as Samson's own criteria. There is never overt conflict in these encounters. These parables of gentle encounter between different monasticisms – in contrast with the tone, if not necessarily the spirit, of Gildas's strictures – reveal the diversity in early monastic practice and how holiness, in the eyes both of contemporaries and of later hagiographers, was seen to arise from monastic experience. As we come to further separate monasticism in the early British Church from its conflation with other matters, we should continue to find more of interest in this remarkable *Vita*.

¹⁶⁹ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 27.

PRESENT AND YET ABSENT:
THE CULT OF ST SAMSON OF DOL IN WALES¹

Karen Jankulak

Vita I Samsonis (VIS) is an unusual source with a particularly complex composition. We remain frustrated by the things it does not tell us, or at least fails to tell us in definitive terms, but many recent studies have shed new light on its evidence both for the saint and for the context of its writing. Some of the remaining challenges posed by *VIS* concern its status as a work of hagiography and its relationship to the cult of St Samson. Past studies placed the composition of the text very early in the seventh century (Duine) and as late as the early ninth (Fawtier).² The current near-consensus appears to place it toward the middle of these polarities, *ca* 700. It is a truism that the dissemination of the cult of the saint is often a largely separate matter to the travels of the saint him- or herself – although this truism was flagrantly ignored by the school of archaeo-geographical study of British saints, led by such scholars as E.G. Bowen and Gilbert H. Doble, which still bears strongly on debates. Our reassessments of the date and nature of *VIS* may mean that it has a particular contribution to make to considerations of the connection between saint and cult. The hagiographer himself claimed to have journeyed through the landscape of Samson's own origins and to have seen in it locations that are directly related to Samson. In some cases these may be sites of a cult, or an incipient cult, of the saint. In Wales, strikingly, none of these sites became – or at least survived as – a conventional dedication to St Samson, in contrast to the substantial number of dedications to St Samson in Brittany as well as in Cornwall. It is both the present and absent evidence for a cult of Samson that will interest us here. Readings of *VIS* have led to the imposition of Samson of Dol onto ambiguous data, especially landscape data, which I will consider here in detail. I will also consider whether *VIS*, written as it was partly on the basis of its author's visits to Wales as well as Cornwall, offers potential insights into the process by which church leaders became culted as saints – acting as a control on the validity of our truisms concerning the formation, persistence, and perhaps disappearance of cults.

¹ I would like to thank Lynette Olson for much useful discussion of the Cornish material. I would also like to thank Jonathan Wooding for abundant and generous assistance in providing support to the writing of this paper in so many ways. Neither, of course, should be held responsible for remaining errors or omissions.

² Duine, *Origines bretonnes*, 66; Fawtier, *La Vie*, 76–7. The recent editor of *VIS*, Pierre Flobert, dates it to the mid-eighth century, perhaps after rather than before 750 (*La Vie ancienne*, 6, 108 and 111). Among the contributors to the present volume, J.-C. Poulin is exceptional in arguing for a late-eighth-century date.

The cult of St Samson in Wales, Cornwall and western England

St Samson was, arguably, on the evidence of *VIS*, a significant figure of memory in the British, as well as Breton, Church. There is, however, no direct evidence of a cult of St Samson in medieval Wales (and little enough in terms of modern Wales).³ We should acknowledge the limited sources for some categories of evidence. There is no evidence of liturgical commemoration of St Samson in Wales from the early or central middle ages. This is surely due to absence of evidence. As Daniel Huws has noted, 'There is no reason to suppose that Wales lacked early martyrologies, calendars and litanies. But none survive.'⁴ The earliest surviving calendar from a Welsh context is that found in London, BL Cotton Vespasian A.xiv, a manuscript also containing a significant collection of Lives of Welsh saints. The calendar is clearly connected to the Lives in the collection, but is not limited to their subjects. Its connections can be traced to the abbey of Saint-Florent-de-Saumur as well as to its daughter-house, a priory at Monmouth. Monmouth lordship and priory both had strong connections to Brittany, in particular Dol.⁵ To the feasts of the Welsh (and Irish, in the case of St Brendan) saints whose Lives appear in the manuscript were added several other Brythonic and Irish saints. Kathleen Hughes identified what she saw as 'odd omissions' from the calendar, including 'Guénolé, Tudy, Custennin, comparatively well-known saints with local cults', as well as Oudocceus (Euddogwy), whose reputed role alongside Teilo and Dubricius (Dyfrig) in the foundation of Llandaff surely would have suggested his inclusion.⁶ St Samson could be regarded as another odd omission, given Monmouth's connection to Dol and the manuscript's inclusion of Lives of Dyfrig and Illtud, both of which mention Samson. Silas Harris's conclusion that the interest of the compilers of the manuscript resided chiefly in St Cadog and those saints in direct relation to him could go some way to explaining this omission.⁷ Other saints included were dedicatees of local churches, but not all.⁸ It remains unclear as to why Samson was ignored.

Cornwall, which has medieval and modern dedications to Samson, also has no medieval liturgical commemorations of the saint, but this is very likely a problem of evidence, as such pre-Norman liturgical texts as exist for Cornwall are very specific to the church of St Germans.⁹ In Anglo-Saxon calendars, of which there are admittedly many more than for Wales and Cornwall, St Samson is mentioned in the tenth-century Metrical Calendar of Hampson as well as other texts of a similar date. Here the context is an importation of the cult from Brittany. The well-attested links of kings Edward the Elder and Athelstan with Brittany (and with Dol in particular) provide an obvious context for what was clearly a significant English cult of Samson

³ While the focus here is on Wales, dedications in Cornwall and Ireland are considered where they impinge on matters arising in *VIS*. There are also dedications to St Samson elsewhere in England but these fall outside the remit of this discussion. That being said, Christine Rauer has argued that the relatively extensive cult of St Samson in Anglo-Saxon England, which appears to be due chiefly to West Saxon links with Brittany, also included significant knowledge of episodes from the life of the saint (Rauer, *Beowulf*, 112).

⁴ Huws, 'St David', 221.

⁵ Harris, 'The Kalendar', esp. 14–16.

⁶ Hughes, *Celtic Britain*, 64–5.

⁷ Monmouth priory having to a large extent supplanted the original parish church of Monmouth, dedicated to St Cadog (Harris, 'The Kalendar', 16).

⁸ Hughes, *Celtic Britain*, 66.

⁹ Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 60–6.

in the pre-Norman period, arising from Breton rather than local connections.¹⁰ It remains an open question whether a similarly Breton-linked cult might once have existed in Wales.

Past searches for Samson in Britain have tended to focus on dedications and place-names. John Reuben Davies observed that 'it is the superficial accessibility of the evidence of place-names and dedications that has tended to be reflected in modern historiographical treatment of the early medieval Welsh Church'.¹¹ He is right to observe that these data often exist in a context of late recording and uneven collection. Samson's cult in Cornwall illustrates some of the difficulties of dating medieval cults: the search for dateable church dedications throws up relatively few, surprisingly small, and relatively late (attested) dedications. Wales is even less well-served than Cornwall and Devon, as we will see.¹²

In seeking the monastery founded by Samson in Cornwall, recent researchers have been willing to consider churches dedicated to Samson, such as at South Hill or Golant.¹³ Lynette Olson made a compelling case for Golant, although South Hill does recommend itself in terms of the significance of its church and the presence of an early christian inscribed stone indicating early medieval christian activity. Both sites have significant medieval evidence of dedication to St Samson – the relatively late date of this evidence (post eleventh century) is unremarkable in the Cornish context.¹⁴ It is worth keeping in mind Nicolas Orme's argument that 'more than one of the churches which supported communities of clergy in the 10th and 11th centuries might be candidates for the site of Samson's monastery, since the church need not have been dedicated to him'.¹⁵ The relationship of dedications to the saint with his historical travels and indeed, potentially, foundations, is, as we have noted, a problematical question. The pendulum has swung between over- and under-credulity in terms of identifying the lives and movements of actual people behind the proliferation of cults of saints and the foundation of churches.¹⁶ Beyond this, however, we are cautious in seeing a saint's dedication as a sign that it was a foundation of the saint him- or herself. Our preferred candidates for Illtud's and Piro's monasteries in *VIS*, for example, are indeed modern place-names that contain the names of these figures (Llanilltud Fawr, Ynys Bŷr). To the list of Cornish dedications to St Samson

¹⁰ Christine Rauer provides a useful summary of the relatively copious Anglo-Saxon evidence (including possession of relics and possible church dedications) in *Beowulf*, 99–111; Radbod of Dol's letter to Athelstan provides evidence of strong links between Athelstan, his father Edward, and Dol (Brett, 'A Breton pilgrim'). See also Blair, 'A handlist', 554.

¹¹ Davies, 'The saints', 362.

¹² Orme, *English Church Dedications*; Dr Graham Jones's work at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies documenting Welsh dedications has not yet been published.

¹³ Olson, *Early Monasteries in Cornwall*, 9–14; Sowerby, 'The Lives', 25 especially n.123; Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 333.

¹⁴ Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 12.

¹⁵ Orme (ed.), *A History*, 135.

¹⁶ Oliver Padel has noted some instances in Cornwall where names – which are not always to be understood explicitly as dedications – might link a medieval church with people from its past, especially in the case of saints with only one dedication: 'Local saints', 312–14. Cf. Olson & Padel, 'A tenth-century list', esp. his comment on *Felec*, patron saint of Phillack church: 'The tenacity of the vernacular tradition of the name, continuing all through the middle ages despite official pressure, and only now vindicated in the second half of the twentieth century, is remarkable' (48–9).

at Golant and South Hill should be added Lelizzick and Isles of Scilly, both medieval attestations. Lelizzick is discussed in more detail below.¹⁷

In Wales, the two existing dedications, at the time of writing, are both of the twentieth century. I will document these in detail, firstly, because they are instructive in terms of how cults develop, and secondly, because modern studies of saints' dedications have on more than one occasion mapped these sites as if they were medieval dedications. In 1924 the Anglican parishes of St Mary, Cardiff and St Paul, Grangetown were merged under the new name 'St Samson, Grangetown'. In 1967 this parish was merged with the nearby parish of St Dyfrig to become Sts Dyfrig & Samson, Pentre Gardens.¹⁸ The dedication on Caldey Island postdates the identification in 1901 by the Revd William Done Bushell, then owner of Caldey Island, of Caldey with *insula Pironis* of *VIS*.¹⁹ This identification was embraced by the new Anglican Benedictine monastic community on Caldey (1906–13), in the second edition of its book *The Benedictines of Caldey Island* (1912). The Anglican abbey had been dedicated to St Bernard of Tiron, whose order had owned Caldey in the middle ages,²⁰ but in or soon after 1913, upon the conversion of the community to Roman Catholicism, it became the 'Abbey of St Samson'.²¹ With the replacement of the, now Catholic, Benedictines by Cistercians from Notre Dame du Scourmont in 1929 the dedication further became 'Our Lady and St Samson', which it remains today.²² A relic of St Samson – described as a 'small piece of bone' – had been obtained in 1919 from the cathedral of Dol and brought to the island that October by the abbot, Aelred Carlyle, in a characteristically ostentatious ceremony.²³ The relic was apparently removed to Prinknash abbey in 1928 or 1929 by the departing Benedictines, because the diary of the Cistercian community recorded its return as a gift to the new community on 25 July 1929.²⁴

St Samson has at times been credited with other Welsh church dedications, and disentangling these data has become now a necessary, if tedious, step in clearing the ground for a more critical reflection. Some supposed dedications are clearly marginal, without compelling evidence. Baring-Gould and Fisher (in their *Lives of the British Saints*) linked several sites in Wales as well as in England to Samson and in this were followed by Doble, who clearly took a slightly more critical view of his material, but was nevertheless inclusive by habit. In this category we can put Marcross in Glamorgan, which Doble also mentioned but discounted, as its source was the 'very dubious authority of Iolo mss.'²⁵ – the notorious forger Iolo Morgannwg. A dedication at Cressage (not located in Wales as such but close to the border) is no longer extant but is known from a single mention, in a register entry

¹⁷ Orme, *The Saints*, 228–9.

¹⁸ 'Glamorgan Archives: Cardiff, St. Samson Ecclesiastical Parish records', www.archiveswales.org, consulted 9 January 2016.

¹⁹ Bushell, 'The early Life', 323, n.1.

²⁰ Anson, *Building*, 243.

²¹ Attwater, *The Catholic Church*, 185. Attwater lived on Caldey in the early 1920s. It remains unclear whether the Samson dedication was adopted on the conversion of the community or as a consequence of the promotion of the cult of Samson in 1919. A statue of St Samson, now standing by the road to the church, was made in 1922, standing first at the door of the church, then moved to its present position in 1954.

²² Jonathan Wooding and I would like to thank Br David Hodges for his advice on the history of the abbey.

²³ Anson, *Abbot Extraordinary*, 211; Attwater, *The Catholic Church*, 186.

²⁴ Howells, *Total Community*, 56–7.

²⁵ Baring-Gould and Fisher, 'S. Samson', 161; Doble, *Saint Samson*, 7.

of 1547 when ‘a wedding in the Chapel of St Sampson Cresteseche without licence from Sir Tho[mas] Botelar’ was held.²⁶

In other cases, the matter is significantly complicated by copying and recopying of data collected by earlier scholars, as well as misunderstanding, at least in some cases, as to what constitutes evidence for a cult or dedication. Here Doble and, in particular, Bowen created many problems by including sites in their discussions and, especially, on Bowen’s maps on the vague criterion that they were ‘associated with’ saints, as well as commemorations of saints whom they treated as ‘followers’ or ‘family’ of a saint.²⁷ These were sometimes differentiated in the legends of maps, but reified in recopying to become of equal status as cult-sites. Bowen’s 1934 map was entitled ‘The Cult of St Samson’ and included indications of ‘a village, church, well, shrine, megalith, etc. bearing the name of the saint’ as well as indicating ‘probable routes followed by St Samson’ – Bowen’s most pressing concern in his 1934 study, ‘The travels of St Samson’. Many of the sites indicated are not mentioned in the accompanying article, nor are they named on its map – a typical problem of Bowen’s works.

We need to be clear on causes of the projection of cults onto the various sites. There is a distinct cluster on Bowen’s 1934 map around St David’s Head, due to Bowen’s theory that St Samson traversed the Dewisland peninsula en route to Ireland – imaginatively developing the story in *VIS* I.37–9 in the light of O.G.S. Crawford’s theory of peninsular roads, as well as possibly picking up medieval legends linking St Davids and Dol.²⁸ Bowen also included a number of Samson geonyms in west Wales (discussed below) in his 1934 map. Both the St David’s Head and the geonyms cluster are absent from Bowen’s later map, in his book *Saints, Seaways and Settlements*, of 1969. This map of 1969 has a slightly different title: rather than ‘The Cult of Saint Samson’ it refers to ‘Dedications to Saint Samson of Dol’ – it is thus considerably less cluttered than its predecessor. It also introduced one additional symbol to the 1934 map’s use of dots: it marked Llanilltud Fawr with a cross, uniquely, presumably due to the (twelfth-century) *Vita Iltuti*’s account of Samson’s burial there – in its account his body was transported miraculously to Llanilltud Fawr in a sarcophagus. This story may have been inspired by the presence at Llanilltud Fawr of several stones of the ninth or tenth centuries inscribed with the name Samson (one an abbot, another described as a king).²⁹ Doble also mentioned a cross called Carreg Samson in Llanbadarn Fawr (Ceredigion) as well as several place-names in Pembrokeshire, but he argued that these commemorated a local Samson in west Wales, associated with St Petroc – we will return to this below.

Pierre Flobert (who was principally concerned with editing the text of *VIS* as opposed to mapping Samson’s cult as such) gave a relatively long list of dedications (and included a map of these) in 1997, including Caldey, St Davids, and Llandaff, and what seems to be Cressage in Shropshire, almost certainly relying on Bowen’s maps of Samson dedications of 1934 and 1969.³⁰ His inclusion of Samson as co-patron of St Davids was presumably connected to the medieval arguments over the metropolitan status of St Davids, one relying in part on a claimed connection to St Samson.³¹ Flobert also listed St Samson, again erroneously, as co-patron of Llandaff. Samson

²⁶ Baring-Gould and Fisher, ‘S. Samson’, 170; Auden, ‘Dedications’, 285; Leighton, ‘The Register’, 106.

²⁷ Jankulak, ‘Adjacent saints’ dedications’, 93–5; Bowen, *Saints*, 81–111.

²⁸ See Wooding above.

²⁹ *Vita Iltuti*, 15 (ed. Wade-Evans, 216–17); Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 13–14.

³⁰ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 15, 294; Bowen, ‘The travels of St Samson’, 66; Bowen, *Saints*, 166.

³¹ Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 65.

was certainly of interest to the compilers of the twelfth-century *Liber Landavensis*, but mainly inasmuch as an abridgement of the *VIS* included in that collection could contradict claims made elsewhere by St Davids that Samson's metropolitan status was enjoyed at St Davids (see further, below).³² *Liber Landavensis* stressed from the very beginning that Dyfrig was archbishop of western Britain, and that Samson became an archbishop only after he arrived in Brittany.³³ Slightly later, Gerald of Wales tried to place Samson as late ninth-century archbishop at St Davids.³⁴ Flobert also erroneously listed a dedication at Hereford, but a comparison of his map to Bowen's map of 1934 might suggest that he mistook Hereford for Cressage.³⁵ All of this illustrates the problem of inferring a cult from simple associations of a site and mapping it with a limited legend of symbols. To sum up: there is no evidence for existing or past dedications – whether or not for a cult – to St Samson at St Davids (or St Davids Head), Llandaff, or Llanilltud Fawr; and significant uncertainty surrounds a dedication at Cressage, over the border in Shropshire. The only dedications to St Samson in Wales, medieval and modern, are our two twentieth-century ones: Caldey and Cardiff.³⁶

The Carreg Samson cited by Doble as a potential indicator of a cult of a St Samson brings up a related category of evidence: geonyms associated with features in the landscape, several of which bear the name of Samson (or Sampson). Chris Grooms has examined the geonyms which attribute features in the landscape to the activities of unusually strong or large legendary characters, including Arthur. One of the more prolific contributors to giantish geonyms is one Samson, who is best explained as the Old Testament strongman Samson (Judges: 13–16). Geonyms associated with Samson are distributed over the whole of Wales, but have a clear concentration in the west, in Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion: one Carreg Samson (Samson's stone) is found on Anglesey, another two of this name are found in Caernarvonshire, and another is found in Glamorgan.³⁷ One Cerrig Samson (Samson's stones) is found in Carmarthenshire, as is one Coetan Samson (Samson's Quoit – this one is also known as Coetan Arthur).³⁸ Five Samson geonyms are found in Pembrokeshire (most near Fishguard): one Bedd Bys Mawr Samson (grave of Samson's finger), one Bedd Samson (Samson's grave, for which see below), two Carreg Samson place-names (one known also as Coetan Samson), and, finally, one Ffust Sampson (Sampson's Flail).³⁹ A large number also appear in Ceredigion ('Cardiganshire' in Grooms): eight instances of Carreg Samson (one is also known as Coetan Samson, one as Ffust Samson – this is discussed below – and one as Esgid Samson [Samson's shoe]), one Cerrig Samson, and one Ôl Troed Samson (Samson's footprint).⁴⁰ All are typically attested in relatively late sources. Some have stories attached to them.

³² Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 65, 128–9.

³³ *Liber Landavensis*, 6, 22 (edd. Evans & Rhys).

³⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, II.i, (see Thorpe [transl.], *Gerald of Wales*, 161–2); Davies, 'The archbishop', 298, 301–2.

³⁵ There is no dedication to Samson in Hereford: see Annett, *Saints*.

³⁶ Orme, *The Saints* 228–30. Cf. Julia Smith's entry for Samson in the *New Dictionary of National Biography*, which refers to 'some' (unnamed) churches dedicated to the saint in south Wales and Cornwall; these are modern rather than medieval dedications (Smith, 'Samson').

³⁷ Grooms, *The Giants*, 221, 223, 225.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 225–6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 221, 223, 224, 226.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 221–6; see also Wmffre, *The Place-Names*, 145, 846, 879, 1001. Cerrig Samson is also alternatively known as 'Ôl Troed Samson'.

It is most probable that all of these geonyms hark back not to the patron of Dol, but to the biblical Samson, in the same way as other giantish figures examined by Grooms. One case alone gives pause: the twelfth-century (or thereabouts) text *Vita Paterni*, which clearly seeks to reconcile numerous different traditions about a saint or saints of this name and is partly set in Ceredigion. There, it says, 'Padarn built monasteries and churches throughout the whole Ceredigion country, over which he appointed leaders, to wit Samson, Guinnus, Guippir, Nimannauc'.⁴¹ Subsequently, once Padarn has returned to Brittany, *Vita Paterni* describes an encounter with a Samson who is clearly Samson of Dol; the encounter results in Samson granting privileges to Padarn's churches in Brittany.⁴² *Vita Paterni* seems to construct its narrative along chronological lines, in which case the author seems to be implying two different Samsons; this need not be the case, considering how many characters are combined and uncombined in its narrative, not least Padarn himself.⁴³ In the early twentieth century Baring Gould and Fisher recorded an undated story set at Llanbadarn Fawr (which is of course held to be Padarn's chief foundation in Ceredigion): according to this story, one of two uninscribed crosses in the churchyard at Llanbadarn Fawr was known as Carreg Samson (this is the Carreg Samson or Ffust Samson mentioned above in Grooms's list, also noted by Doble, as we have already seen) because the two crosses represented broken pieces of the saint's flail.⁴⁴ The sheer number of Samson geonyms in Ceredigion (some but not all are located close to Llanbadarn Fawr), taken together with the evidence of *Vita S. Paterni*, does suggest that there may be some connection here, although the date at which the identifications and connections were made is entirely unclear: aetiological stories develop at any time and can change over time.⁴⁵ It is worth stressing that the actual cross in the churchyard bears a secular rather than an ecclesiastical signifier, *carreg* Samson rather than, for example, **croes* Samson.

Bowen interpreted these Samson geonyms as a christian imposition on a pre-christian past, concluding that they presented

interesting evidence of the attempt to convert megalithic remains around which pagan ceremonial had gathered to Christian uses ... whether it was St Samson himself or one of his monks who actually visited the sites of these megaliths is not known, but the association of the name of the Saint with the stones clearly indicates that the traditions of the Celtic West were for cultural assimilation rather than for cultural replacement.⁴⁶

Bowen was, of course, looking for traces of saints in the landscape and seeking to explain their distribution with reference to the travels of saints or their followers. However, these Samson geonyms are reasonably straightforward if viewed in the context of Grooms's other giants; we can agree that they represent christian reinterpretation of older sites, but between the Old Testament Samson known

⁴¹ *Vita Paterni*, 14 (ed. Wade-Evans, 256–7).

⁴² *Vita Paterni*, 24–6 (ed. Wade-Evans, 262–3).

⁴³ See Brett above.

⁴⁴ Grooms, *The Giants*, 224; Henken, *Traditions*, 119; Baring Gould and Fisher, 'S. Samson', 170.

⁴⁵ Two other instances of Carreg Samson in Ceredigion mentioned by Grooms also include late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century lore about a bishop Samson of Llanbadarn Fawr: *The Giants*, 222, 224.

⁴⁶ Bowen, 'The travels of St Samson', 67.

through the coming of christianity and St Samson himself, the former is surely a simpler explanation.

The case is less clear when we consider associations of the name Samson with wells, holy or otherwise, where the dedication to saints is more common. Proximity of stone monuments to what are considered holy wells, however, can cast doubt on the case for the saint. Grooms, in his survey of geonyms associated with giants, includes a relatively small number (four) of names with the element *ffynnon* (spring or well): Ffynnon Baich-y-cawr (Well of the giant's burden) in Montgomeryshire – with no trace of a holy well but presumably commemorating one; Ffynnon Rhiw'r Cawr (Well near giant's slope) in Merionethshire – this is unique among these examples as being an existing well with a well-attested modern tradition of healing; Ffynnon-y-cawr (Giant's spring) in Merionethshire – with no trace of a well and an Arthurian story recorded in the nineteenth century; and Ffynnon Cegin Arthur (Spring of Arthur's kitchen) in Caernarvonshire – mentioned by Ieuan ap Rhydderch in the fifteenth century.⁴⁷ These four items have, clearly, been included by Grooms because of their explicit mention of giants; other instances of *ffynnon* plus personal name (of a giant? of a saint?) are less clear.

This problem in distinguishing between the various possible Samsons in place-names and geonyms (including well-names) is of particular interest when we consider several Samson geonyms in Pembrokeshire which include two instances of Ffynnon Samson. One is or was at Trenichol farm, in Llandeloy parish (attested from 1770). Francis Jones included this well in his survey of holy wells of 1954 and spoke to at least one local person about the local interpretation of its dedicatee, which was at the time understood as *not* being St Samson (for which see below).⁴⁸ The parish of Llangolman contains a place-name Ffynnon Samson that is arguably a well-established holy well, attested as early as 1603 in George Owen's *Description of Pembrokeshire* and appearing on modern Ordnance Survey maps.⁴⁹ B.G. Charles, in his survey of the place-names of Pembrokeshire, listed in his index Samson, eponym of these two place-names, under 'other personal names' rather than under the category 'names of saints' – presumably because he either did not recognise these as referring to a known saint or because he had not located the holy well or wells.⁵⁰ Jones also listed a Pistyll Samson (spout or cataract of Samson) near a Bedd Samson, in Newport parish; Bedd Samson has been mentioned above with respect to Grooms's list and is an attested geonym, but Pistyll Samson, as Mike Ings noted, is not otherwise attested.⁵¹ Finally, Jones referred to a fourth well which he had not found, 'said to be in Mynachlog-ddu parish'; he seemed to be relying on the RCAHM survey of Pembrokeshire which in turn cited a later, augmented reprint of an earlier article by Bushell (as a separate pamphlet) identifying a Ffynnon Samson in this parish – the RCAHM survey commented somewhat drily, 'This spring could

⁴⁷ Grooms, *The Giants*, 48–50, 127.

⁴⁸ Charles, *The Place-Names*, 92, 223; Jones, *The Holy Wells*, 210 (as no. 2 of his list). This well is not included in Mike Ings's 2011 project, which assessed a sample of holy wells for Dyfed Archaeological Trust (Ings, *Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Holy Wells*).

⁴⁹ Jones, *The Holy Wells*, 201 (as no. 1 of his list); Ings, *Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Holy Wells*, 84–5 (as PRN 987, although listed wrongly as being in Mynachlog-ddu parish).

⁵⁰ Charles, *The Place-Names*, 831, 833–4.

⁵¹ Jones, *The Holy Wells*, 210; Ings, *Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Holy Wells*, 29 as PRN 1519 – Ings suggested that a nearby well, his PRN 12915, Ffynnon Careg or Currig, apparently commemorating St Curig, might lie behind Jones's reference (23). Jones does include a Ffynnon Gurig 'in Newport, where Ffair Gurig was formerly held': *The Holy Wells*, 208.

not be located with any degree of certainty'.⁵² The ease with which such toponyms become lost, conflated, and reified by repetition is typical of the data set. When readers use the maps of Bowen, for example, it is helpful to reflect that this is often what lies behind the dots.

Jones viewed these sites, as with other holy wells, as straightforward markers of the distribution of the saints' cult (although he did caution that the Lives themselves were likely to have inspired dedications). He linked this cult to Samson's own stay in Pembrokeshire. He further cited the numerous Carreg Samson-type names as evidence of St Samson's cult.⁵³ In his view, these were examples of one onomastic story replacing another, with the Old Testament Samson replacing an original St Samson, rather than the other way around. His comment in one case is explicit: 'I was told by a parishioner of Llandeloy (Pembrokeshire) that a local Ffynnon Samson was named after the Biblical hero – he had forgotten – indeed never known – that the Celtic St Samson had laboured in Pembrokeshire.'⁵⁴ From Jones's 'nativist' point of view such a place-name must have originally referred to the Celtic saint with the biblical referent secondary. It is arguably more probable that the Old Testament Samson was the original referent, as so many of these geonyms refer to types of features associated with legendary giants and strongmen.⁵⁵ We should, of course, admit that at some time all this may, through convergence, have functioned in popular memory as evidence of Samson of Dol.

One final cluster of Pembrokeshire place-names is suggestive in a different fashion. The modern Ordnance Survey map of the area near Stackpole shows a farm called Sampson as well as a Sampson Cross nearby – there are three standing stones in the area known by the name Devil's Quoit, one of which, as Grooms noted, might well be an alteration from Samson's Quoit, given the farm name.⁵⁶ The precise origin of the place-name is not clear – it is possible that the standing stones gave rise to the farm name. Bushell, in 1903, in trying to locate the events of *VIS* in the Welsh landscape, placed the cave [*sic, recte castellum*] to which Samson, Amon his father, and two others retreated near the Severn, before Samson alone made a further retreat to another cave on the southern Pembrokeshire coast (*VIS* I.40–2). Bushell made this identification tentatively, mainly following what he could discern from the text's own clues, but commented, as well: 'as it happens, there is still to be seen at Stackpole, near Rock Point, a cave which satisfies the main conditions of the narrative [*VIS*], whilst in the immediate neighbourhood there is a farm which, *for*

⁵² Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments, *Inventory*, 245; Jones, *The Holy Wells*, 43, n.91. Jones gave his source as 'Arch. Cam. 1903, 319', which is Bushell, 'The early Life', but this source did not mention a well. It is instead mentioned in a later and augmented reprint of this article, which was then cited by the RCAHM survey; Ings included this unlocated well (*Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Holy Wells*, 62–3) as PRN 4984. I would like to thank Jonathan Wooding for finding Jones's source, as well as for providing helpful discussion and many references.

⁵³ Jones, *The Holy Wells*, 43–4 and n.92.

⁵⁴ Jones, *The Holy Wells*, 4.

⁵⁵ The same thing seems to have happened in Downpatrick – a cromlech associated with the Old Testament Samson moved John O'Hanlon (based on a 'letter addressed to the writer, by Mr. John W. Hanna, and headed Downpatrick, 30th of May, 1872') to argue: 'It has been more reasonably conjectured, however, that its denomination may rather be referable to our present St Samson, who spent a considerable term in Ireland' (O'Hanlon, *Lives*, VII.431, n.66). While Samson was indeed reputed to have visited Ireland (see below), Downpatrick is quite distant from where he is supposed to have been.

⁵⁶ Grooms, *The Giants*, 166.

whatever reason [my emphasis], bears the name of Samson's farm',⁵⁷ hence neither endorsing nor discarding the possible relationship between the site in the text and the place-name. Later, as noted above, Bushell augmented his article with, among other things, a note explicitly connecting St Samson to an unlocatable Ffynnon Samson in Myanchlllog-ddu parish (nowhere near Stackpole parish, it should be said). Evidently, to him the association of a well with a saint was more likely than such an association between a saint and other types of sites – this is an entirely reasonable approach. In 1935 Doble took the identification in a slightly different direction, arguing that Samson Cross and farm took their names from a Samson, *not* St Samson of Dol but a local Samson, associated with St Petroc, on account of the proximity (less than two kilometres) of these Samson sites to a church dedicated to St Petroc at St Petrox (its dedication attested from at least 1291⁵⁸). This reflected Doble's belief in the significance of the 'pairing' of saints' dedications in more than one region, based on the fact that a Samson appears in the medieval *Vitae Petroci* as well as, possibly, in a dedication proximate to Padstow, Lelizzick, in Cornwall.⁵⁹

The Samson commemorated at Lelizzick has usually been understood as Samson of Dol (and is presented as such explicitly in *Vita II Petroci*), who has a cult elsewhere in Cornwall, as noted above. *VIS* presents its subject as landing in Cornwall, visiting *Docco*, and crossing the peninsula. The text adds intriguing information about what Samson found in Cornwall: a monastery of some age at *Docco* (reliably identified as St Kew near the north Cornish coast),⁶⁰ as well as a performance of apparently pre-Christian ritual further inland in the region described as *pagus Tricurius*. The text thus preserves in the Cornish sections two place-names of significant antiquity (I.45–51). *VIS* does not mention Padstow, nor St Petroc, but Lelizzick, near Padstow on the north coast, would be a logical landing place. The earliest Life of St Petroc, *Vita I Petroci* (late eleventh century), shows St Petroc making a similar journey, and meeting a hermit Samson on landing at this site – its later revision (twelfth century) augmented this episode, inserting into the text a brief account of Samson's subsequent career as bishop of Dol.⁶¹

Doble's theory that the Samson at Lelizzick should be understood as a separate, Pembrokeshire figure stemmed from his view of how cults of saints in the Brythonic world could be expected to function. The habit of seeing saints in connection to each other was an extremely significant force in the medieval development of the cults of saints, especially, it seems, in the Celtic regions, and Doble's own work can be seen as a continuation of this trend.⁶² Doble, however, was the first scholar to pursue explicitly the theory that local Welsh, Cornish, and Breton saints could be found in discernible clusters replicated in other Brythonic regions and that these repeating clusters could be attributed to the movement of saints themselves, or at least of their cults, at a very early, foundational period. This depends, of course, on being able accurately to identify and date place-names and dedications, and, crucially, on the assumption that such identifications do not change over time, or, if they have changed, on our ability to discern an original dedication from a replacement one (as Jones purported to do, above). This argument was, not surprisingly, responsible

⁵⁷ Bushell, 'The early Life', 333.

⁵⁸ Jankulak *The Medieval Cult*, 15.

⁵⁹ Doble, *Saint Samson*, 7.

⁶⁰ Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 14, 81–2.

⁶¹ *Vita I Petroci* 5–6 (ed. Grosjean, 490–1); *Vita II Petroci* 5 (ed. Grosjean, 150–3).

⁶² Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult*, 114; Jankulak, 'Adjacent saints' dedications', 92–3.

for ‘inventing’ some otherwise unattested ‘local’ saints.⁶³ When Doble came to investigate St Samson, he was keen to ‘split’ some Samson dedications or attestations into what he argued were their original, local figures.⁶⁴ He argued, for example, that the Samson of Carreg Samson in Llanbadarn Fawr churchyard (discussed above) was a separate local Samson, an associate of St Padarn, and indeed *Vita Paterni* does not contradict this view (nor does it prove its historical accuracy, of course).⁶⁵ Doble had also discerned a local Samson/Petroc nexus from Cornwall, and accordingly he sought it elsewhere: he found it in Pembrokeshire, in the Samson geonyms near to St Petrox.

These identifications might be seen as suggestive, but evidence is entirely lacking: there is no compelling reason to identify the Cornish Samson at Lelizzick as St Samson of Dol, especially in light of the *VIS*’s omission of any mention of the site, although, equally, there is nothing to disprove such an identification. However, making the Samson of Lelizzick into a local Pembrokeshire saint and connecting up the Pembrokeshire place-names (not dedications, not containing ecclesiastical place-name elements but geonyms very possibly having to do with an Old Testament Samson) commemorating Samson with the dedicatee of Lelizzick is surely a stretch too far, and depends too strongly on discovering or inventing recurring clusters of saints’ cults.

For my part, I too was uncertain of the significance and origin of St Petroc’s Welsh cult sites in connection to his significant Cornish cult when I pursued my doctoral studies (completed in 1996 and published in 2000); I am even less certain of their significance now, some decades later. The Stackpole (St Petrox) dedication, in particular, occurs in isolation, without clear context. Unlike the two other Welsh dedications to St Petroc, at Y Ferwig and Llanbedrog, there is no tradition of stories about St Petroc at St Petrox.⁶⁶ Even more, then, would I be reluctant to use the St Petrox dedication to identify a local Samson dedication, based on association of cults, or even perceived association of cults found in Cornwall. There is not sufficient evidence to argue that the place-names at Sampson farm and Sampson Cross (near St Petrox in Pembrokeshire) referred originally, or even were understood to refer later, to St Samson of Dol or even to any other St Samson. The best explanation is that the name originated with standing stones named after our Old Testament Samson.⁶⁷ I am not averse to finding local saints previously hidden by more notable saints of the same name (St Petroc himself springs to mind – there is no reason to argue that he is merely St Peter in local disguise). We do well to keep a very open mind on the subject and the Samson at Lelizzick may well be a case in point. However, John Reuben Davies’s measured assessment of the supposed replacement of cults in the March in the Norman period is relevant here – assumptions of what we assume a pre-Norman Welsh landscape of dedications ought to have looked like can easily

⁶³ See Ó Riain, ‘The Saints’, 390 and Jankulak, ‘Adjacent saints’ dedications’, 98–9 for St ‘Gwbert’.

⁶⁴ Doble, *Saint Samson*, 7, 20; Doble, *Saint Petrock*, 24–5.

⁶⁵ Doble, *Saint Samson*, 7.

⁶⁶ Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult*, 13–14; Jankulak, ‘Adjacent saints’ dedications’, 108–9. It must be said that Y Ferwig and Llanbedrog also lack obvious explanation.

⁶⁷ It should perhaps be noted here that Samson is not the only saint as well as giant in Grooms’s list of giants: St Cybi seems to have been seen as a giant at times as well: Grooms, *The Giants*, 160.

form arguments without supporting evidence.⁶⁸ However, in this case the evidence surely points to an Old Testament Samson, at least in Pembrokeshire.⁶⁹

We see in all this a clear expectation and a desire to find Samson both with dedications in his homeland and leaving a trail of evidence for his cult in places where he is supposed to have journeyed. There are, however, no attested medieval dedications or commemorations to St Samson in Wales, and none from a later period that can confidently be read back into the middle ages. The presence of geonyms including the name Samson is a complicating factor, but, the well at Llangolman apart (it would be unfair, considering the nature of evidence for holy wells, to say that its connection with St Samson is tenuous at best, but certainly there is no context in which to read back a medieval connection to this figure), these can be explained as commemorating the strongman Samson of the Old Testament, and best placed in the very well-attested category of giants in the landscape as surveyed by Grooms. If the biblical Samson is a better fit than St Samson, this is not because an Old Testament (in effect pre-Christian in its origins) aetiological story needs to be older than an explicitly christian (post-New Testament) one – one can envisage an existing giant-in-the-landscape story having one giant replaced with another, if need be. The type of site (*ffynnon*-sites aside, perhaps) is appropriate to this sort of story, in which a large strongman moves stones or throws them as quoits or otherwise causes changes in the landscape – in other words a more probable narrative than the wandering saint, which is often a projection onto the bare detail of the Life itself.

Vita I Samsonis and the apparent cult of Samson

We have so far considered the evidence that contributes to belief that there was a cult of St Samson in Wales and some of the ways this has been connected to interpretation of the text (and vice versa). One challenge is to uncouple received narratives from the data – such as the idea that the travels of the saint in the *Vita* have any direct relationship to landscape traditions of Samson. Another, more basic, challenge is to collect and project the data in ways that obviate a past tendency to conflate antiquarian theories with what is actually in *VIS* (Bowen, Baring-Gould) and to define, where possible, whether the Samson one encounters in local tradition is necessarily the saint of the text (cf. Jones, Doble). One thing that emerges strongly in this process of sorting our data is that it is burdened with prior assumptions. One of these, which does bear reconsideration, is whether we should necessarily expect to find an early cult of a saint in a country which he deserted in his early career. Would a cult arise where a saint simply lived or travelled?

One significant consequence of Pierre Flobert's re-edition of *VIS* is the re-examination of the purported source lying behind the text, a **Vita primigenia Samsonis*, which, whether or not one accepts an earlier or later date for *VIS*, can be

⁶⁸ Davies, 'The cult', esp. 37–9.

⁶⁹ I note as well here Brynach Parri's assertion that 'Tŷ Illtud above [Llanhamlach] and Bedd Gŵyl Illtud are the only examples in Wales of prehistoric tombs named for a saint'; near Llanhamlach is also Maen Illtud as well as Ffynnon Illtud: Parri, 'Illtud', 102.

understood as closer again in date to the period which it purports to describe.⁷⁰ *VIS* is remarkably uninterested in the foundation of Dol, or in the saint's rule or way of life, *conversatio*, there, concentrating on these crucial issues with respect to the saint's career in Britain. Leaving aside the Prologue, if we judge the content of a **Vita primigenia* by the content of *VIS* (see for example I.1, I.11), we must agree with Poulin that the putative **Vita primigenia* not only described Continental doings (as explicitly stated in the Prologue) but must also have contained a considerable amount of material devoted to Samson's activities in Britain.⁷¹ Additional material was also gathered by the author or redactor of *VIS* in Britain.⁷² We might note in this connection the apparent mention of at least one additional written source available to the author either of **Vita primigenia* or of *VIS* (*gesta emendatiore* of I.1; also *indiculum quod ego audiui lectum* of I.42).⁷³

Richard Sowerby concluded, reasonably, that **Vita primigenia* had as its main interest the monastery founded by Samson in Cornwall, was kept there, and was composed on its behalf.⁷⁴ That there are two main sites in Cornwall at which we might locate the monastery lying behind this activity, themselves evidence of a well-established medieval cult of Samson in Cornwall, might be seen to support this argument, although we have noted, along with Orme, that a relationship between the medieval dedications and Samson's own travels is not to be taken for granted. Efforts to identify which monastery was that referred to in *VIS* can call upon medieval evidence, albeit as Lynette Olson noted, 'typically none is attested before the eleventh century'.⁷⁵ Whether or not individual scholars accepted the earliest possible date, its information, especially as regards a monastery founded by Samson, the named monastery at *Docco*, and the regional place-name *pagus Tricurius*, have been deemed to be creditable and worthy of investigation.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*: all references to *VIS* are to this edition. For example Poulin, in 1977 (before Flobert's edition), cast doubt on the existence of a **Vita primigenia*, which he understood to be described as being brought to Brittany by Henoc ('Hagiographie et politique', 9); by 2001 Poulin was able to devote a considerable amount of discussion to this text, which he viewed as firmly existing albeit not entirely recoverable, now being understood to have been brought to Samson's Cornish monastery from the Continent, by Henoc ('La "Vie ancienne"': *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 313–20, esp. 319). Flobert himself by contrast became increasingly dubious as to the existence of this text, as Poulin noted (*L'hagiographie bretonne*, 313, n.7).

⁷¹ Poulin, 'La "Vie ancienne"', 292–3; Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 313. Poulin's concordance shows the potential magnitude of **Vita primigenia*'s contribution to *VIS* (*L'hagiographie bretonne*, 348–52). Magali Coumert's thought-provoking but fanciful suggestion that Judwal's kingdom might have been a British rather than a Breton one (*VIS* I.59) is useful in highlighting the fragility of assumptions about the existence and nature of political units for which there is no evidence except in later and often highly agenda-ridden contexts (Coumert, 'Le peuplement'. Cf. Sowerby, 'The Lives', 6, n.28; Brett, 'Soldiers', 41). Equally intriguing, if still somewhat fanciful, is Bernard Merdrignac's suggestion that the text describes a double kingdom, one on both sides of the Channel, albeit with an important caveat: 'Bien sûr, rien ne garantit que l'enchaînement des événements tels que relate l'hagiographe corresponde à la réalité historique' (Merdrignac, 'Présence', 90). Merdrignac, 'Des "royaumes doubles"', espoused the at least potential historicity of at least a notional double kingdom (esp. 62).

⁷² Poulin, 'La "Vie ancienne"', 293.

⁷³ Poulin, 'La "Vie ancienne"', 271; Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 314, 326; Sowerby, 'The Lives', 30; but cf. Olson, 'The early hagiography', 127 with n.35.

⁷⁴ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 28.

⁷⁵ Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 12.

⁷⁶ Compare for example Olson, *Early Monasteries*, 10–11 with Padel, 'Christianity', 118 as well as Orme, *A History*, 7–10.

Sowerby saw in *VIS* a clear concentration on Samson's Insular career, inherited from its Cornish source. In his reading the foundation of the Cornish monastery was an obvious climax for the putative **Vita primigenia* that underlies the extant *VIS*. However, we can still say of the supposed **Vita primigenia* that it spends a lot of time talking about Wales. *VIS* has Samson consecrate existing churches in Wales for his mother and aunt (I.45). When he is consecrated a bishop (I.42–4) this is in Wales, not Cornwall. The detailed accounts of his *conversatio*, a crucial aspect of the hagiographical text, take place in Wales. The Cornish monastery may mark the ultimate focus of the substrate **Vita primigenia*, but it is still notable that the miracle stories of book II seem to be exclusively located at Llanilltud Fawr.

There is clearly a continuing commemoration by the Cornish monastery of its founder: *VIS*, both in its reliance upon the **Vita primigenia* as well as in its citation of what its author, himself, has seen (although the two are not always able to be disentangled) is proof of that.⁷⁷ Of particular interest is an episode in Cornwall at which Samson settled his monks at a site adjacent to his own occupation of a cave. There St Samson performed a miracle, instructed his followers to found a monastery, and concerned himself with prayer and fasting in his own cave – a subsequent miracle story concerns the cave rather than the monastery (I.50–1). We can compare the account of this foundation in Cornwall to that of an earlier foundation before Samson left Wales. According to *VIS*, Samson made a *habitation* for his monks at the *castellum* near the Severn. An *oratorium* was constructed there at which Samson would celebrate mass. Samson inhabited a cave nearby. The hagiographer concludes by saying that this site remained greatly venerated during the period of his own visit (I.40–1).⁷⁸ It is striking that with respect to the Welsh *oratorium* the author of *VIS* specifically mentions continuing veneration, what we might define as cult activity, at a site that is clearly no longer extant.

In these terms both Dol and the Cornish monastery seem to stand out in *VIS* as important foundations but not necessarily as the loci of cult activity in the larger sense; indeed the notable lack of interest taken by *VIS* in Dol as anything other than a site from which Samson exists in a mainly political context perhaps highlights the hagiographer's willingness to clearly signal the quite different roles filled by St Samson in different settings and in his different foundations. Throughout *VIS* we can perhaps see a progression not merely from the monastic, eremitical, and individualistic (in Wales) to the episcopal and institutional (at Dol), but also in terms of the text from considerable attention paid to informal cult devotions to almost none at all, at Dol, with Cornwall in the middle of this process both geographically and spiritually.

The site by the Severn seems, at least to the author of *VIS*, to be a place of informal continuity of commemoration – albeit so informal that it did not produce a lasting church dedication, but inasmuch as the activity at the site is devotional, perhaps evidence of cult. Is this a rare glimpse into the processes whereby holy figures become venerated as saints in early Britain? Our own expectations about how cult sites would be marked by church dedications (with their 'superficial accessibility'), as well as our fixed ideas of what constitutes an early medieval christian church site, have perhaps

⁷⁷ Sowerby, 'The Lives', 29.

⁷⁸ See Ahronson & Charles-Edwards, 'Prehistoric Annals', 457–8, for Samson's caves.

prevented us from seeing these hidden sites and processes.⁷⁹ We look for the process from the latter end, if you like, the dedications that persisted, whereas past scholars looked for the cult in the activities of the saint himself. The hagiographer of Samson visited the sites of Samson's activity at a date arguably around a century after the time of the saint, but (as we now see) rather earlier than most of our other evidence for British saints. The disjunctions we see here – for example, sites of activity or memory that did not turn into the superficially accessible data – may be important for understanding how saints came to be culted in the landscape in the way they are.

The cult in medieval Wales and Ireland

Medieval interest in *VIS* is first visible in Wales in the Norman period and in that sense surely belongs to the complex and multifaceted 'renewal of indigenous cults' which John Reuben Davies characterised as 'a cultural transmission which passed as much from conquered to conqueror as the other way around'.⁸⁰ It is striking that while *VIS* has an exclusively Continental manuscript tradition, it was known to the redactor of *Liber Landavensis* in the early twelfth century. As Flobert commented, this throws up two points of significant interest with respect to *VIS*: first, that at least part of the text of *VIS* was known in Britain, and second, that the connection of Samson with the nearby Llanilltud Fawr was known and utilised.⁸¹ The text found in *Liber Landavensis* is abridged and emended; consistent with the aim of *Liber Landavensis*, which was to appropriate Dyfrig to the see of Llandaff, the emendations build up Dyfrig and play down Samson.⁸²

It is notable, then, that Samson was a saint of interest, considerable interest, within the archiepiscopal machinations of Norman Wales. Perhaps related to this is the cult of Samson in Ireland. *VIS* includes a visit to Ireland, to a site reasonably identified as Howth Head, near Dublin, where an unnamed monastery was given to St Samson (I.38). It is striking, but not necessarily related, that the only church dedication to St Samson in Ireland was that in the parish of Balgriffin, which is located very close to Howth.⁸³ As Pádraig Ó Riain noted, this was probably coincidental – the dedication is best explained in the context of the installation of a Welsh family after the Norman invasion which gave its name to the parish.⁸⁴ Seán Duffy offered further precision, identifying the overlord as a Gruffudd ap Cynan (*ob.* 1200), probably the great-grandson of his better-known namesake, and attributed the dedication to this context,⁸⁵ but the matter is complicated by the difficulty in explaining why a Gwynedd family would have a particular connection to a south

⁷⁹ As Olson noted, 'At no time is the word *monasterium* used in connexion with this site [that is, the site by the Severn] (*Early Monasteries*, 11, n.13); among other things, this perhaps reflects an over-reliance on a 'monastic' model (see Brett, 'Review', 122). H.M. Auden suggested Cressage as this site ('Dedications', 285); Bushell suggested Stackpole ('The early Life', 333) – neither is very convincing, the one being too far from the coast and the other being too far from the Severn, surely.

⁸⁰ Davies, 'The cult', 51–2.

⁸¹ Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 42.

⁸² *Liber Landavensis* 6–24 (edd. Evans & Rhys). See Flobert, *La Vie ancienne*, 43–54; he concluded, 'Il est remarquable qu'aucun manuscrit ne provienne sûrement de Bretagne, mais il en a existé' (52). See also Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 320–4.

⁸³ O'Hanlon, *Lives*, VII.430.

⁸⁴ Ó Riain, 'Samson', 321.

⁸⁵ Duffy, 'The Welsh conquest', 106; cf. Reeves, 'Memoir', 143.

Wales saint.⁸⁶ *Liber Landavensis* shows us that the saint was, however, known to Norman Wales, and his significance exploited. Gruffudd's better-known namesake was involved in the translation of relics to establish saints' cults.⁸⁷ Perhaps the fact that a Samson dedication appeared in Ireland in an area under Gruffudd's family's control is a further example of this wider interest.

There might be different explanations as to how St Samson appeared on the horizons of Llandaff and perhaps, in turn, of Gruffudd ap Cynan: perhaps *VIS* itself came to be known, through some unknown mechanism (keeping in mind its exclusively Continental manuscript tradition), and its obvious implications grasped; perhaps Samson himself was commemorated at Llanilltud Fawr as a significant saint (of the several inscribed stones found at the site, one probably of the late eighth century mentions an 'abbot' Samson, another probably of the early tenth century mentions a 'king' Samson) and thus was seized upon in that context.⁸⁸ In the light of the cult in western England, the most compelling argument is that Samson was chiefly known to Llandaff through his Breton cult and through the large part played by him in the metropolitan pretensions of Dol.⁸⁹ The nature of the emendations to *VIS* by the redactor of *Liber Landavensis* downplays Samson himself and builds up Dyfrig and Illtud for particular and understandable reasons: Samson's supposed status as archbishop in Brittany was cited by Llandaff's rival, St Davids, in its own claim to metropolitan status; showing Samson's subordination to saints claimed as founders by Llandaff, SS. Dyfrig and Illtud, was of primary importance to rebutting this claim. Samson himself did not embody the antiquity and authority of Llandaff (neither, in fact, did Dyfrig or Illtud, but *Liber Landavensis* was in that sense a useful forgery), but *VIS* usefully illustrated how Dyfrig and Illtud could, and endowed Samson with his legitimacy through them.⁹⁰ So much was Samson himself written out of the picture in compiling *Liber Landavensis* that his royal lineage was changed from that of Dyfed to one of Meath, in Ireland (its proximity to where Samson supposedly visited Ireland, as well as to a dedication at Balgriffin, is suggestive).⁹¹ All of this points to a distinct promotion of Samson in the twelfth century, into which process *VIS* was drawn.

That Samson was not included in the calendar in Vespasian A.xiv, despite significant overlap between the Lives in this manuscript and those in *Liber Landavensis* (see above), may be due to *Liber Landavensis*'s very specific and apparently limited interest in Breton material – arguably connected to the metropolitan controversy. As Davies has noted, the Llandaff Life of St Teilo contains additions originating in the Life of St Turiau of Dol but not found in the Vespasian version of the Life. Davies commented that the Llandaff addition is 'the kind of addition one might expect from a writer [that is, of *Liber Landavensis*] who has been collecting Breton hagiographical material' – this clearly is not so much the case as regards the various compilers of the Vespasian manuscript, Monmouth's Breton and Dol connections notwithstanding.⁹²

⁸⁶ Duffy, 'The Welsh conquest', 106 n.32. There is also a townland called Ballysam(p)son in Wexford, the origin of which is unclear (O'Hanlon, *Lives*, VII.430).

⁸⁷ Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 39.

⁸⁸ Redknap & Lewis, *A Corpus*, no. G65, 377–82; no. G66, 382–9.

⁸⁹ See, for the Breton metropolitan debate, Poulin, *L'hagiographie bretonne*, 343. Davies has shown that a significant number of texts from Brittany must have been available to the authors of *Liber Landavensis* (*The Book of Llandaf*, 130).

⁹⁰ Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 65.

⁹¹ *Liber Landavensis*, 6 (edd. Evans & Rhys).

⁹² Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 119.

The case of St Samson is probably similar: however much his status as bishop or archbishop and his associations with SS. Dyfrig and Illtud might have been of interest to Llandaff, his profile as a local Welsh saint beyond this specific remit seems to have been minimal.⁹³

Absent saints: Samson and Gildas

Richard Sharpe has argued, using the cults of saints as a case study, that our historiographical obsession with the ‘Celticity’ of the early medieval British church has obscured its continuity from a Roman past.⁹⁴ This emphasis on continuity is entirely in keeping with recent scholarly trends, and can perhaps provide a context for a reconsideration of *VIS*’s Welsh (and Cornish, although this is not treated in detail here in this paper) episodes. Sharpe has argued for categorisation of saints into an early period of martyrs, about whom we know very little (and who are associated with Latin terms such as *basilica*, *martyres*, and *memoria* found in both Irish and Welsh contexts), and a second phase, from the mid-sixth century onwards, of local saints who are confessors and whose place-name elements are no longer shared between areas on either side of the Irish Sea – in the case of Wales being mainly formations in *llan* and to a lesser extent *merthyr* and in Ireland mainly *cell* and to a lesser extent *teampall*.⁹⁵ On the evidence of *VIS* Sharpe went on to identify several saints as overlapping between the earlier and the later periods: Dyfrig, Illtud, and, albeit somewhat indirectly, Samson himself. John Reuben Davies, writing in the same volume as Sharpe, came to similar conclusions about the uses to which *VIS* can be put: as evidence for Dyfrig and Illtud.⁹⁶ This is understandable, given that, clearly, one cannot locate Samson churches or dedications or even cult in medieval Wales in order to trace a development between the earliest foundations and their later histories – questions of historiography are tied up, directly, with questions of loss of cult, and how to judge absent evidence as either lost or not existing.⁹⁷ Samson existed, in the earliest period, but disappeared, almost completely. Apart from a few mentions in *Lives of St Illtud*, he has left no compelling trace in *Lives of other Welsh saints*. Moreover, perhaps for the same reasons, he is entirely absent from the sort of familial, dynastic, and genealogical connections which were clearly considered to be important to Welsh saints of the middle ages, so much so that they can be considered a defining feature of their cults.⁹⁸

The absence of a discernible medieval cult in Wales puts Samson, perhaps by coincidence, in a similar position to Gildas: both are accepted as historical figures with a strong British presence; neither is commemorated, as far as we can now tell, by church dedications or place-names.⁹⁹ Perhaps by coincidence both are concerned with texts which exist in something of a historical vacuum, lack, at crucial moments,

⁹³ Harris, ‘The Kalendar’, 24–5; Davies, *The Book of Llandaf*, 108.

⁹⁴ Sharpe, ‘Martyrs’, 94.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 144, 148; Parsons, *Martyrs*, *passim*.

⁹⁶ Davies, ‘The saints’, 370, 394.

⁹⁷ Parsons, *Martyrs*, provides a detailed discussion of these issues as regards place-names in *merthyr*.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Bartrum’s summary of Samson in his *Welsh Classical Dictionary*, 575–8. See also Jankulak, ‘Adjacent saints’ dedications’, esp. 117; Charles-Edwards, *Wales*, 617–18. This despite the emphasis on family in *VIS* discussed by Sowerby above.

⁹⁹ Jankulak & Wooding, ‘The British cult’.

straightforward information, and are used by historians with extreme caution. There are also differences: *De excidio Britanniae* might be difficult to date and to pin down in terms of information, but its basic historicity has not been challenged; similarly, while Gildas was, like St Samson, the object of a saintly cult in the middle ages, this has little to do with his profile as a historian, and therefore his lack of a cult in Britain has not served to remove him from the historical record as it arguably has done with St Samson in Wales.¹⁰⁰ These differences do not vitiate the similarities: like Gildas, St Samson, at least as far as *VIS* was concerned, was subject to a Roman-style education; like Gildas, the author of *VIS*, or, more probably, the author of **Vita primigenia*, was at pains to consider the proper nature of monasticism, and to consider the competing attractions and demands of eremitical and coenobitic monastic life.¹⁰¹ Gildas is difficult to localise in early medieval Britain and has only a very limited, post-Norman cult there; Samson has left no cult in medieval Wales but can be localised, in particular for the crucial matter of his early education, at Llanilltud Fawr, according to *VIS*. It is never a good method to fill a vacuum (in this case where was Gildas writing; where did he obtain his inexplicable Roman education?) with inference from later sources. But if we consider *VIS* to show reasonable signs of relying to a large extent on an earlier source, we can more comfortably speculate that Llanilltud Fawr provides at the very least an example of the sort of place we are seeking in which to situate Gildas, if not the place itself.

Moreover, *VIS* indicates, in its author's description of the *oratorium* near the Severn, that a local cult of St Samson existed at the time of the hagiographer's own travels some decades later. It is difficult to judge the significance of this local cult: by the later medieval period Samson was clearly overshadowed in Wales by Illtud and Dyfrig and his usefulness to Llandaff was chiefly as their foil. Political considerations seem to have dominated whatever cult there was of St Samson, with an emphasis on his status in Brittany; at the same time, whatever local cult there was in Britain had withered. Samson was, after all, a *peregrinus*, a saint who left, but whose Life allowed for his reconnection to a landscape in which a cult had perhaps failed to persist. This moves us into the realm of speculation, and beyond what the limited evidence, and absence of evidence, can support. At the very least, however, it reminds us that the author of *VIS* has more to tell us than just about St Samson's own lifetime, and our use of it as a historical source can move beyond questions relating directly to the person of St Samson, to the vital and often undocumented period of cult building and cult declining in the century or so after his death.

¹⁰⁰ Jankulak & Wooding, 'The British cult'. I would like to take this opportunity to make a minor correction to this article: as pointed out by Stephen Joyce of Monash University and contrary to what I wrote at the time ('The British cult', 29), Gildas is indeed mentioned in William of Malmesbury's *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis ecclesie*. While it is difficult to distinguish between the original text and its many later interpolations, William in ch.7 does seem to have mentioned Gildas as being at Glastonbury for many years – the subsequent statement that he died and was buried at Glastonbury is a later interpolation, and William does not seem to have known other stories about Gildas at Glastonbury, such as are contained Caradog of Llancarfan's Life of St Gildas. A further reference to relics of Gildas (ch.22) is of unclear antiquity. Scott, the editor of *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis ecclesie* speculated that the Arthurian associations of Gildas made William cautious about embarrassing himself (see Scott, *The Early History*, 23–4).

¹⁰¹ Wood, 'Forgery', 380–4.

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The First Life of St Samson of Dol (*Vita Prima Samsonis*) is a key text for the study of early Welsh, Cornish, Breton and indeed west Frankish history. In the twentieth century it was the subject of unresolved scholarly controversy that tended to limit its usefulness. However, more recent research has firmly re-established its significance as a historical source.

This volume presents the results of new, multi-disciplinary, assessment of the text and its context. What emerges from the studies collected here is a context of greater plausibility for the First Life of St Samson of Dol as an early and essentially historical text, potentially at the centre of early British Christianity and its influence on the Continent. The landscape of that Christianity is gradually emerging from the shadows and it is a landscape in which the career of St Samson, the first Insular *peregrinus*, is shown to be of considerable importance.

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Cover image: St Samson crosses the Channel to reach Brittany. Stained-glass window in Dol Cathedral. Service de l'Inventaire du Patrimoine Culturel © Région Bretagne.

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